DOCTOR S·O·S

LEE + THAYER

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DOCTOR S. O. S.

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Doctor S. O. S.
Q. E. D.
That Affair at "The Cedars"
The Key
The Mystery of the Thirteenth Floor
The Sinister Mark
The Unlatched Door

Doctor S. O. S.

BY
LEE THAYER

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First Edition

TO

MARY C. LEE

WHO HAS NEVER FAILED TO ANSWER
TO THE CALL OF "S. O. S."

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DOCTOR S. O. S.

DOCTOR S. O. S.

CHAPTER I

THE story I am going to tell you had its beginning late in the spring of the year 1919. The World War was but just over, and our streets were still full of bronzed boys in worn uniforms, over-seas caps perched lightly over one ear, gay striped ribbons across the breast, and we still looked with interest at the chevrons on the right forearm to see if they were gold or silver. The mad tumult of whistles down the bay when a new transport came in was dwindling in volume, week by week, though the hearts of mothers, sweethearts, and wives still thrilled when the deep-throated sirens called out that the boys were coming home.

This is in no sense a war story, and the reason I tell you so particularly of the date is only that things might have been as they couldn't have been if it had not been for the war. This you will see for yourself, if you have patience and stay with us to the end. And so—to the story.

"What do you think about it, Doctor S. O. S.?"

Stuart Ogden Stafford, a small, spare old man

with thick gray hair and moustache, lifted his wise, kind eyes from his plate and glanced across the candlelit dinner table at the lovely face of his questioner. The dimple beside the girl's mouth brought an answering whimsical smile to his lips. His gray eyes lighted with amusement as they shifted from the small, dark, elderly man at the head of the table to the plump, fair little woman at its foot.

The latter met his look and turned to her daughter reprovingly.

"How can you call Doctor Stafford by that ridiculous nickname, Patricia? It's all very well for your uncle Morgan"—with a glance at the somewhat bored and frowning face opposite her. "You must remember that he and Doctor Stafford went to college together, and what is seemly between two old friends is quite out of place and impertinent for a girl of your age. Not that I mean to criticize you, dearie. You know Mother never does that. But I'm sure Doctor Stafford——"

The doctor raised a protesting hand. "Oh, Mrs. Carrington——"

"I know what you're going to say, Doctor Stafford," the little lady went on, sweetly, smoothing the fine white crêpe bands at her wrists and readjusting a broad collar of the same material which relieved the severity of her fashionable mourning dress. "I dare say you don't mind what the dear child calls you. Everybody feels the same way about her. I'm sure there wasn't a man or an

officer at the training camp at Speedwell who wouldn't have allowed her to call him anything in the world, if she'd only speak to him. She was the most popular girl in the whole camp——"

"Oh, Mother!"

"You were, dearie. It would be foolish to deny it. You can imagine how it was, Doctor Stafford! Our lovely old Southern home there—the officers coming and going all day long—such gaiety and excitement—such a change for our aristocratic, sleepy old Speedwell—such a chance for a girl to—to—well, to meet the sort of men she ought to know. And Patricia as careless of her opportunities—— Oh, well, let it go. A mother's advice, what is it worth? And her father, my poor sainted Hugo—"a slight pause in which an infinitesimal handkerchief appeared from some mysterious hiding place—"my poor husband, as indifferent to that sort of thing as she. They were both as cordial to a mere private as they would have been to a general. Of course, there's reason in all things. I'm not possessed of ambition," with a gentle glance upward as if she called a complaisant and confidential Heaven to witness her unworldliness, "and some of the privates were well born and exceedingly well off. A military title isn't in any way essential, especially now that the war is over. But, oh, dear, the house was filled half the time with Smiths and Joneses and O'Rourkes. Dear Hugo and Patricia would drive in from the camp with some boy just out of the

hospital who needed comforts and good food, and he was as like as not to have come down to North Carolina from up here in one of your New York slums! There was one"—her voice dropped almost to a whisper—"who didn't even know who his father and mother were. Imagine! In my house, which had been the home of Desmonds for Heaven knows how many generations. Poor, dear Hugo——"

"Leave Hugo out of it, Louise, please!" The man at the head of the table spoke almost brusquely and gave his pointed gray beard an impatient tug. "Hugo was hardly to blame if he couldn't forget that he'd been what you call a Yankee and his sympathies, naturally, were with all those boys from the North, as well as those from the South, who were going over to face death. Stuart, here, knows as well as we do that Hugo squandered his fortune and yours too. It took him a long time, and he did it most thoroughly and effectively, I'll admit. He never could be made to see the value of money, but, aside from that, I don't believe he had another fault on earth." The keen, virile old face softened. "Though he was only my half-brother, I was proud of him and he was more to me, in spite of my seeing so little of him, than——"

"Why, Morgan! You speak as if I'd been criticizing poor Hugo! As if I could do such a thing! How can you? Could any one mourn for him as I do?" Mrs. Carrington touched the dead black folds of

her gown with delicate, plump, curling pink fingers and pressed her tiny handkerchief to her eyes. "Even if he did lose all our fortune and leave me penniless," she sobbed.

"Well, well, Louise," said Morgan Carrington, not unkindly, "you and Patricia have your home with me, such as it is." He looked out of the broad window and across the darkening green of trees and shrubbery to the spread of bright, pale blue which was the Hudson, to the deepening purple wall of the Palisades, and to the faint rose of the evening sky. "It's different from what you're used to, I know, but we'll have to make it do, eh, Patty?"

The girl looked up at him with troubled eyes. She had paled a little, and the brave smile with which she had accustomed herself to face their altered fortunes had almost faded from her face. She had adored her father, and his loss was recent and bitter—how bitter, no one but herself could know.

"You've been so awfully good to us, Uncle Morgan," she said.

"Nonsense! Not at all! Blood's thicker than water, I hope." Morgan Carrington's voice was naturally dry and a little hard. His manner was abrupt, but his eyes, under their thick overhanging brows, were full of kindness as he looked at his niece. They twinkled a little as he glanced sidewise at Doctor Stafford. "What were we talking about, Stuart, when——"

The butler, a tall, well-made young darky in spotless white jacket, appeared at his elbow.

"'Scuse me, Mistah Carrin'ton, suh. Will you-all have de coffee yere aw in de livin' room, suh?"

"Sam!" Morgan Carrington spoke irascibly. "How many times must I tell you to go to Mrs. Carrington for orders? I shouldn't think it would take several months to get the idea through your head that she is mistress here."

On the darky's coal-black face no blush, however deep, would have been visible, but his white teeth flashed in an apologetic grin and his contrition showed in his voice as, passing around the table, he meekly repeated his question to the aristocratic little lady who sat at its foot.

She regarded the butler with a slight frown of annoyance. "I think we'll have it here, unless," catching her brother-in-law's eye, "you'd prefer, Morgan, to have it in the——"

"Why not on the porch, Mother? It's such a wonderful evening. The first right warm evening we've had," said Patricia, looking out of the window. "It wouldn't be too cold out there, would it, Uncle Morgan?"

"Just what I was thinking," said Carrington, with a smile, getting quickly to his feet. "Come on, S. O. S."

"Oh, Morgan!" exclaimed Louise Carrington, gushingly. "You are always thinking of the loveliest things. What could be nicer than having

coffee on the veranda. And I never thought of it. Poor little stupid me!"

Carrington stood at the door, waiting for her to pass out before him, but instead she slipped her small hand into the crook of his elbow and drew him gently forward.

"Come out and I'll make you so nice and comfy," she said. "The tender gloaming! How beautiful it is!"

As he passed through the door, Carrington glanced back at Doctor Stafford with a look which was a curious compound of boredom and a courteous and helpless fury.

The little byplay did not escape the eyes of the waiting butler, Sam, who grinned broadly as he went back to the kitchen.

"Uh-hum, Lily," he said to the comely coloured girl who stood by the stove. "Hit's allus like dat. Ah asks de wrong pusson what ah's to do 'bout any livin' t'ing, 'caze ah's suppose' to ask Mis' Carrin'ton en ah fergits ebery time. She don't neber know nuttin' ontwell somebody tells her—sometimes hit's Mistah Carrin'ton en sometimes hit's Miss Patty. You know sumpen, gal? She's mighty anxious to please de boss, de old lady is. I done notice hit eber since we-all come yere. Hit's 'Morgan, would you like dis?' en 'Morgan, would you like dat?'" —in imitative falsetto—"twell de po' man's pestered to deaf. Yas, suh! She's done got her cap set fer de boss a'ready, ah do beliebe!"

"Aw, gwan, Sam. You's what de white folks calls sentimentalish, you is. You sees lots mo' dan what you's paid to see, boy. You run along ob dat coffee now, befo' hit gits cole." She gave Sam a playful but heavy slap on the shoulder as he took up the tray.

"Hi, yi! Watch out dere, gal. You'll mek de coffee slop ober if you ain't keerful. Look out de way, now, en quit you foolishness!"

"Aw right, Sambo. Ennyt'ing you say, suh. But mine you put de coffee fer Mis' Carrin'ton to po' en not Miss Patty like you done de las' time en got call' down fer. Reckon you kin 'member ontwell you gits out on de po'ch, you fool niggah, you?"

"Lily, don't you call me dat, en me wid my han's full!" Sam's shoulder was against the pantry door. "Wait twell I comes back, gal. I'll fix you. Uh-hum!" His white-toothed smile suggested that his vengeance would not be of an especially serious nature.

"Sam! Ef you comes projeckin' 'roun' me——"

Sam darted through the door as a wet dishcloth came smack against it in the place opposite which his head had been.

"Dat gal sho has got sperrit," he chuckled to himself, admiringly. Passing through the house and out on to the porch, with a face as expressionless as that of an ebony idol, he dutifully placed the coffee tray in front of Mrs. Carrington.

CHAPTER II

"THIS is very comfortable," said Doctor Stafford, leaning back luxuriously in the deep low wicker chair which almost enveloped him. "All this lovely world"—he motioned with his thin, sensitive hand toward the river and sky which were now faintly illumined by the rising moon—"and kind and lovely women"—his gray head inclined toward Mrs. Carrington—"kind and lovely women," he repeated, "who let us smoke. Eh, Morgan? It's wonderful, isn't it?"

Morgan Carrington assented absently.

"Of course gentlemen should be allowed to smoke," said Mrs. Carrington with a little gush of sweetness which somehow reminded the doctor of the manner in which syrup pours from an over-full jug. "I like the smell of a good cigarette and I adore a pipe! I think a pipe is really becoming to some men. Don't you, Doctor Stafford? A man with a beard now—I think a man with a beard should never smoke cigarettes. A pipe, however, makes a real picture, now, doesn't it?"

She turned her head a little sidewise and gazed at Morgan Carrington through her long light-coloured lashes. He drew his favourite briar from his lips

and acknowledged her adoration in the pipe's behalf with a none-too-gracious nod.

"Good of you, Louise, I'm sure," he said, shortly. "Don't know what I'd do if you objected to my old comforter. But if you approve of smoking for men, why not for women too?"

"Oh, Morgan!"

"Yes. I mean it. I can't see why some of you Southern women make so many unnecessary distinctions. If smoking is a comfort to a man, why isn't it to a woman? A great many ladies—even you, Louise, would admit that they are ladies—do it, and why not? It's pleasant and companionable. If I were so unfortunate as to be married—I beg your pardon: that sounds a bit discourteous—if I had a wife, I'd *make* her smoke. Yes, I would, whether she liked it or not."

Doctor Stafford laughed. "Oh, Morgan, you're just the same old Morgan as ever. I believe that if you thought sawdust was good for your problematic wife, you'd make her eat it. And while you overbore her natural disinclination for so unnatural a diet, you'd continue to insist, as you did at dinner tonight, that you believe in absolutely equal rights and opportunities for men and women."

"Well, I do," averred Carrington, hotly. "And you do, too, S. O. S., and you know it."

He rose impatiently. Pushing his chair out of the way, he crossed over to the porch rail and stood with his back to the soft glories of the sky. The

light from the dining-room windows fell in warm oblongs across the floor of the porch and, rising at an angle as it struck the railing, picked out the white of his shirt-front and gleamed in his quick, self-willed eyes.

"It's all nonsense, the way girls have been educated," he continued. "It's not so bad now in the North, at least not quite. But in the South, especially among the conventional old families, it's a crime."

"Oh, Morgan!" reiterated Mrs. Carrington. It was her favourite phrase and sometimes in the months that they had been living in the same house, her brother-in-law felt that if she said it again, he would certainly be obliged to throw something at her. It was the sight of Patricia which restrained him from showing his annoyance by so much as a word. He glanced now at the clear oval of her face, at the light which shone on her smooth dark hair, at the dark eyes raised to his and, turning to the doctor, he went on, more quietly:

"I've been trying to make Louise see, Stuart, that Patty ought to have an education which would make her capable of taking care of herself if—if anything should happen to me. Of course, they're all right as long as I'm here."

He paused and turned about, facing the river, which was growing brighter as the moon climbed up through the high reaches of the sky. The faint sound of movement in the dining room behind them

ceased and the light was switched off, leaving the porch in shadowy darkness in which the doctor's cigarette gleamed and paled as he smoked quietly.

Patricia had remained for the most part silent. Instinctively she avoided any participation in the discussions which so often arose between her quick-tempered uncle and her gentle but persistent and, it must be admitted, obstinate mother. Through the invincible sweetness of Louise Carrington there ran a tough thread of purpose, like the cord through old-fashioned rock candy. If the faintest glimmering of one purpose of her mother's had begun to dawn on Patricia, she was too loyal to her upbringing to admit it even to herself. She rose now, and going over to her uncle, slipped her arm through his.

"You aren't sorry, Uncle, are you," she asked, softly, "that you opened your heart and the old home to us?"

"No, no, Patty. Never in the world, my dear." He spoke in an undertone. "Only I want to do what's best for you and I can't make your mother see it."

"Neither could Father." The girl's voice was sad and regretful but without perceptible bitterness. "He wanted me to have an occupation, a profession or something that would make me independent, but Mother wouldn't hear of it—and I'm afraid it's no use to urge it on her, since Father failed."

"Your father was very much in love with her," said Morgan Carrington, with apparent irrelevance, and

added to himself, with sarcastic emphasis, "I'm not."

After a pause he led Patty back to her seat and resumed his own.

"What's your opinion, Stuart?" he asked, abruptly. "Shouldn't every girl, in this day and generation, be able to take care of herself no matter how she's placed?"

"I'm sure Doctor Stafford thinks as I do, dear Morgan," said Mrs. Carrington, plaintively. "Your wonderful man's brain sees clearly in all matters of business import, I know. But in things which touch a girl's life and happiness, believe me, a mother is the best judge. A woman's place is the home." She uttered the banality with the air of one who had discovered a great and shining truth. "A girl should be beautiful as a flower is beautiful, without sordid thoughts and cares. I would die if I believed that my lovely child would ever have to come in contact with the rude world—with rough, uncultured men." She shuddered delicately and drew her white shawl closer about her shoulders as if the very idea turned her cold.

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed in me, Mrs. Carrington," said Stafford with a little humorous chuckle. "I belong in the other camp. I'm a crank on the subject of work. A job, a real job, is the best friend any man or woman can have. It will stand by one when friends fail, when life is blackest, when one's heart is breaking." His tone had

changed to one of deep seriousness and he added, quietly, "I know."

A silence fell upon the little group. The doctor's thoughts went back over the long years to the time when he was young, when Miss Mary, as he always called his wife, walked by his side, her hand clasped in his; to the day when that clasp was loosened and Miss Mary went on into the land of silence.

He remembered her as she lay there with the long stalks of lilies on her breast; remembered how the call had come for him—a voice crying in the night—a summons to do battle for the life of a stricken child—and of how she had seemed to smile as he left her.

"There's nothing like a job, a real job," he repeated, and throwing his head back suddenly, sent a shower of ashes and tiny sparks from his cigarette over the breast of his coat.

"Look out there, Stuart," cried Morgan Carrington, as the doctor brushed them off hastily. "You'll be burning holes in Julius Cæsar."

The doctor laughed. "You're way behind the times, Morgan. This is the reign of Charlemagne."

"Charlemagne? What does he mean, Uncle Morgan?" asked Patricia, leaning forward in her chair.

"Why, Patty, this old Doctor S. O. S. has worn the same kind of a prehistoric coat ever since our college days. The boys laughed at it, even in that remote period, and called it pre-Adamite, but Stuart didn't care a hang. Said it suited him, and every year or so he's had another made exactly like the last.

I hate to think how many there have been, but you can judge for yourself, for we've come down through all the periods of ancient history and have arrived, as you see, at the mediæval. I remember the Ming dynasty very well, Stuart. It was when we were young and gay, and old Ming appeared on a good many occasions that must have opened his slanting Oriental eyes."

The two old men laughed together at the recollection.

"It was during the reign of one of the Ptolemies that you were married, wasn't it, Stuart?"

"Yes," answered the doctor, quietly, "Ptolemy III, Euergetes."

"I was Stuart's best man, Patty, and I tried to persuade Miss Mary—we all, even Stuart, called her 'Miss Mary'"—Morgan Carrington's voice softened as he spoke the name of the woman who had been dead many years but who still lived in the carefully hidden recesses of his heart, a bright and tender memory. "I tried to persuade Miss Mary," he repeated, "to make Stuart get a reasonable coat for the wedding, but she wouldn't hear of it. Said those broad lapels and the high collar suited him, and he was so pleased with himself that he's gone on looking like a fashion plate from an old Godey's ever since. Such is the vanity of man, my dear."

"I think I agree with Miss Mary," said Patricia, softly. "I can't think Doctor Stafford would look right in any other kind of a coat."

"Thank you, my dear child." The doctor spoke tenderly. The natural sympathy between the old man and the young girl had predisposed them to each other from the moment of their meeting, and in the months which had elapsed Carrington had viewed with satisfaction the ripening of instantaneous liking into a real friendship. Nothing could have served to make him more sure that his own estimate of his niece's worth and character was correct.

"But don't you like the dinner coats the gentlemen wear now, Doctor Stafford?" cried Mrs. Carrington, quite oblivious to the undercurrent of sentiment in the previous conversation. "Morgan looks so attractive and comfortable in his. I should think——" The little lady, whose taste was fashionable and conventional in the extreme, launched forth on a dissertation which bade fair to become interminable.

At the first break in the steady flow of innocuous comments, Doctor Stafford felt, mechanically, for his watch and exclaimed:

"What time is it getting to be, Morgan? I broke the crystal of my watch this afternoon. Eleven? Good gracious, I'd no idea it was so late. I ought to have gone long ago. Good-night, Mrs. Carrington. Good-night, Miss Patty. Will you be up bright and early to-morrow, as usual? I noticed your peas as I came over. They're much farther along than mine. You're a fine little gardener—or perhaps it's the warmth of your smile that draws the plants out of the ground. You won't need sun in your garden,

Morgan, but I think it's hardly fair to competitors. Wish you'd spend more time in my garden, Miss Patty. Come over to-morrow, do. Good-night, Morgan."

"I'll come up through the garden with you, Stuart. Haven't finished my last pipe yet." Carrington, who had been immersed in thought, rose with a nervous start and stood aside for the two women to pass him. "Oh, confound Sam. He hasn't left a light in the house," he cried. "Pardon. I'll give you some light here."

He passed in quickly and touched the button of the switch. The wide old hall and stair looked pleasant and homelike, though the furnishings were out of date and showed signs of wear. The house, which had belonged to the Carringtons for several generations, had been let furnished for many years. Hugo Carrington had gone South when he was a young man and had married there. Morgan, who was much older than his half-brother, had never married and had had, until recently, no family responsibilities except the care of his nephew, his sister's son. The boy had been old enough, when his parents died, to be sent first to a boarding school and then to college. He was now with the Army of Occupation in Germany. This had left Morgan Carrington free to live his life of a comfortable bachelor in a New York hotel, a life which he had found agreeable even after his retirement from active business. It was not until the death of Hugo, less than a year before,

that it had seemed advisable to occupy the house, which had opportunely fallen vacant, and to make a home for his penniless niece and her mother. He sighed, now, for his selfish freedom as he watched the two women ascend the stairs. Louise Carrington turned on the landing.

"You'll not be long, Morgan, will you?" she asked, solicitously. "You must be sure to get a good night's rest, you know. You've had so many years of loneliness. No one to look after you, poor dear. But Patricia and I will take care of you now. And you'll come in my sitting room for a little quieting chat before the fire, won't you? Don't forget"—she shook a playful forefinger—"I'll be waiting for you. I shan't be able to sleep till I know you're safely in."

Again Doctor Stafford noted the half-concealed look of helpless annoyance on his old friend's face. It brightened, however, when Patty in turn reached the landing and leaned over the balustrade to smile a last good-night at the two men below.

"She's worth the price of admission, anyway, Morgan," said Stafford as the two old friends passed down a narrow hall at the back of the house.

"You bet she is," returned Carrington, fervently, if inelegantly. His speech, as well as his actions, was full of a nervous energy unusual in one of his age.

Opening a small door at the rear, he swung it wide and left it open so that a faint light from the farther hall shone on the gravel of the path.

"Does she, Patty, remind you of any one, Stuart?" he continued, as they walked slowly up through the terraced garden.

Doctor Stafford stopped.

"Yes," he said, "yes. She has Miss Mary's hair and eyes and there's something about the expression of her mouth, half said, half laughing——"

"Hm-m, yes," said Carrington, clearing his throat. "Features are different, of course. Miss Mary's were more regular. But there's something—there certainly is something."

They stood for a moment in silence. The smell of honeysuckle and early roses was in the air. The moon shone down on the doctor's silvered head and touched, not unkindly, the bald spot in the midst of Morgan Carrington's dark hair. All about them earth mists were rising, showing faint and ghostly against the deep shadows of the old trees into which the path turned when it reached the level space at the top of the garden.

"What was that?" Morgan Carrington started nervously.

Stafford had heard it, too. The sound, or the shadow of a sound as of a foot upon the gravel in the darkness under the trees.

"Sam or Lily, maybe," he answered, carelessly.

"No, no," whispered Carrington, uneasily. "They've gone to bed." He motioned to the house, where a light could be seen in the upper story. "No one has any right on my place at this time of night."

His tone was very low but expressed irritation, annoyance out of proportion to its cause—and, in thinking it over afterward, Stafford wondered if there were not, also, a note of fear in his voice. At the moment, he attributed it to the landholder's natural resentment against trespassers.

"Well, come on," he said, readily, "we'll soon see who it is."

"I don't like it," muttered Carrington, angrily, as they went cautiously forward. "The aqueduct running along here—a thoroughfare—and not a thoroughfare."

They had entered the dense shadow under the trees and paused to listen. Once more they heard a faint crunching of the gravel under a heavy foot; then silence, absolute and profound.

"Hurry up or we'll lose him," said Stafford. "He must have reached the aqueduct."

With quickened pace, in another moment they had gained the path which ran north and south along the turf-covered embankment. Straight and level it lay before their eyes on either hand, here, for a short space, clear in the misty moonlight, there, swallowed up in the blackness of arching trees. Nothing upon it moved or stirred.

"No use trying to follow," said the doctor, shaking his head as he glanced quickly from left to right. "We don't know which way he went. I don't believe it was any one who meant any harm. This neighbourhood's too lovely and peaceful."

"Perhaps you're right. Of course, it's no use trying to find the man now. He could get away too easily. It's a menace, this path along the aqueduct. I've always felt it to be so," said Carrington, still angry. "No police, no protection of any kind. Free to any one on foot at any time of day or night —and as easy to disappear from——"

"Oh, don't worry, old chap," said Stafford, easily, surprised at the other's heat. "We're all perfectly safe here. There's no manufacturing element in this immediate vicinity, and the rougher characters farther down the river seldom come up this way. Why, they don't even steal my peaches! It was probably a maid and her sweetheart who strolled in to make love under the trees. They didn't want to be seen, naturally."

"Didn't sound like more than one person," grumbled Carrington, unconvinced. "There's too much chance for any kind of devilment in a place like this. The only police in the whole section are down at the station, or some other place where there's no likelihood of there ever being need of them, and I can't get any one to see the necessity of patrolling this path, though I've already taken it up with the village authorities. You mark my word, Stuart, they'll see, when it's too late—when there's been a bad burglary or some other outrage. This unlighted path is like an engraved invitation to a gang of crooks——"

"What's the matter with you, Morgan?" asked

the doctor, sharply. "You never used to be nervous. Something is bothering you. What is it? Stomach out of order? Are you sleeping well?"

"No, Stuart, I'm not, and that's a fact," said Carrington, more quietly. "I've had a lot to think of lately—and I've been pretty wakeful. Thought I heard footsteps around the house, late. Probably just fancy. It doesn't matter. Don't mind me. I guess everything will come out all right." Then, after a pause, in a lighter tone, "I can't get Patty out of my mind. The girl hasn't been taught anything of any use. Her mother's a fool," he added, bluntly.

"That isn't very gallant," Stafford put in, laughing. "The lady's admiration for you is rather apparent, if you don't mind my saying so. She evidently doesn't think you are a fool."

"Humph," grunted Carrington. "I'm not at all sure that she doesn't, now you mention it—though I wouldn't have spoken of it. And Hugo dead less than a year. I'm not at all sure that Louise doesn't think I'm all kinds of a fool, dammit. And maybe I am—I feel so cursedly helpless sometimes, Stuart, that I—— Oh, my God. Poor Hugo! I always wondered what he saw in her. Never could stand her myself. Wouldn't say so to any one but you, of course, S. O. S. That's why I didn't go down to North Carolina more often. Hadn't been there in years, really. Hoped she might have learned some sense—but she hasn't. I'd like to teach her a

lesson. She's so confoundedly sweet and stupid and obstinate about everything. She gets pretty close to being able to put over anything she may want —especially with Patty. She has what a friend of mine calls 'feather-bed resistance.' You think you've made a deep impression—that's easy. You can do it with one hand. But while you're looking the other way, she comes softly up again to the same place."

Stafford laughed and nodded, understandingly.

"And her attitude about the girl makes me furious," Carrington went on. "What would they do if anything happened to me?"

"Why keep harping on that?" asked the doctor, looking at him keenly. "What should happen to you, Morgan?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Carrington, uneasily. "Lots of things might. I'm not as young as I was once and I don't know how long I can stand—— But never mind about that. I'd like to be sure about that girl. I'd like to make sure. I've been worrying about it—needlessly, perhaps—and about—things. Stuart," he broke off suddenly, laying his hand on his old friend's arm, "if anything unexpected should happen, you'd keep an eye on the girl, wouldn't you? Help her to straighten things out and get on her feet. I know you would, S. O. S."

The doctor frowned a little at the nickname, coming as it did in conjunction with his friend's evident

anxiety. "S. O. S."—a call for help. What had Morgan on his mind? Was there any special reason?

"Aren't you making yourself a bit ridiculous, old man?" he asked, placing his hand on Carrington's shoulder. "Your nerves seem to be all on edge to-night. Come in and have another pipe before you go to bed and I'll give you a bromide to make you sleep."

"No. No, thanks, old man. I left the house door open. I'd better be getting back. I have to go into town to-morrow, worse luck, and I'm going to make an early start. Don't want to oversleep." He shifted restlessly from one foot to the other, hesitated, and then said, "But you haven't promised me, S. O. S., about Patty, you know. You would keep an eye on her——"

"Of course, old man," assented Stafford to humour him. "In any wholly unlooked-for contingency I'll be her father confessor. I promise."

Carrington surprised him by holding out his hand.

"Thank you, Stuart," he said, as their hands met. "Good-night."

"Good-night, and sleep well," Stafford responded.

They were standing in front of the doctor's house, an old whitewashed stone farmhouse, which fronted on the aqueduct. It had been the birthplace of many a Carrington and still belonged to the estate. The doctor, when he had retired from active practice, had rented it from his friend, Morgan, and

had been its only tenant ever since. Stafford's foot was on the one low step of the porch when he hesitated and turned back.

"Just a moment, Morgan," he called, softly.

Carrington was opening the high gate in the hedge which bounded his own grounds.

"What is it, Stuart?" he asked, and stepped back on to the path.

In thinking it over afterward, Doctor Stafford could not be sure whether or not it was the moonlight which made his friend's face so white. It did not trouble him at the time. It was only later, when he recalled the picture of pale, misty light and black shadows, that he wondered.

"If you're going into town to-morrow, Morgan," he said, "I wonder if you'd mind taking my watch to Tiffany's and having a new crystal put in it? Would it be out of your way? Any other place would do, only I know Tiffany usually has the right size. I'm lost without it. I can't carry my old Benjamin Maud clock around with me and I don't know when I'll be going to town."

"Glad to do it, S. O. S. I'll be right near Tiffany's. Have to go to the bank and it's in the next block."

"Be awfully obliged to you, old man. Just wait a moment."

Stafford went quickly into the house and, returning almost immediately, placed an old-fashioned, open-faced gold watch in Carrington's extended hand.

"I'll take care of it for you, Stuart," he said, somewhat absently.

The doctor thought he was going on to say something more but he only coughed, a short, sharp little cough, somewhat like a bark, which was characteristic of him. He looked in Stafford's face for a moment, earnestly. Then—

"Good-night again, Stuart," he said, and abruptly turned and vanished through the gate.

CHAPTER III

THE sun, unconcerned with daylight-saving rules and regulations, rose at his appointed time the next morning, dusted his shining face with powder puffs of pink cloud, and smiled down on an admiring earth. Being a gay and vain person, he was probably not unaware of the flattering look of the bright, dark eyes which glanced up at him from a vine-shaded window of Morgan Carrington's house.

Patricia had risen early, as was her custom, and after an appreciative look at the beauties of the day, dressed quickly, and softly descended the stairs. She loved all kinds of healthy, lovely things, and her overflowing fund of young energy found its most congenial outlet in the old-fashioned garden, among the vegetables and flowers, where much work was needed at this season of the year. In the scarcity of labour that spring, Sam had proved a fairly acceptable helper with spade and shovel in the early stages of planting, but his lack of knowledge had proved a menace to the tiny shoots when they lifted their timid heads from the earth.

"Ah clar to gracious, Miss Patty," he had exclaimed, looking down ruefully at a bed in which

weeds and plants had sprung up with disconcerting simultaneousness, "ah don' see how in de worl' a man's gwine to tell which fum t'other. Seems like ev'ythin' you plant's done got a weed whut wan's to grow up en look 'zackly like it. Ah don't know huccome 'tis, lessen hit's de Mas'r's wish, like de Good Book say, fer de tares en de wheat to lie down tergedder twell de harves'."

"Well, if they did lie down together till the harvest, Sam," said Patricia, laughing, "there wouldn't be any harvest, I reckon. You'd better go in and help Lily. I think I can manage all right by myself since we're through the hardest part. I'm glad to have something to do."

Since then Sam had slept, in the morning, the sleep of the care-free and the lazy and Patricia had gone forth alone, armed with a hoe, to do battle with the slender green lances of the unwelcome weeds.

Her mother had been very much alarmed for the girl's beautiful complexion, and it was in deference to her mother's wishes that Patricia wore a broad, shady hat and a pair of heavy gardening gloves. Her rubber-soled shoes made little noise on the shining old floor as she crept down the hall to the back door.

The door into the kitchen at her left was closed as usual, but Lily was already down, for Patty could hear her singing softly as she went about her work. The words were indistinguishable but Patty recognized the tune and supplied them for herself as she unbolted the small back door.

"My mammy was a washer, her name was
Auntie Sins,
She had fo'teen li'l chillens, she use dem fer
clo'es pins."

Patricia was still smiling as she turned and softly closed the house door.

As she did so, her breath caught in her throat.

Securely pinned to the centre of the panel was a small rectangle of manila paper. At the top, crudely drawn in black, was a skull and crossbones. At one side, in the same rough style, appeared a dagger, dripping red.

"WATCH OUT! YOUR TIME IS COME."

The words were printed irregularly in large letters, and at the bottom of the paper was a black hand.

It was an ugly thing. Ugly in itself and in its implication. Who, in that quiet place, could have put it there? Who was it that the horrible thing menaced? What could it mean?

Patricia shuddered at the sordid hideousness of it and glanced from the white door all about the widespread garden.

The sun shone as bright as ever on the rich mass of fleur-de-lys, purple, yellow, and palest mauve, which crowned the grassy slope of the first terrace. The old brick steps with their archway of green vines looked as they had looked every pleasant morning since she had come here to live, here,

in this strange land, with this strange uncle whom she scarcely knew, but who had seemed to her so kind. . . . Everything, even the old house, had seemed so kind and sympathetic, so homely and sensible. There had been no hint of mystery, no least preparation for this horrid thing which stared her in the face.

From the open kitchen window came the rich Southern voice, a little clearer now, since the singer must be standing close inside—the care-free voice of a happy, care-free race:

"My daddy was a doctor, his name was
Dandy Jim,
He cut down all de treeses for to amputate
de lim'.
Aw-w-w-w—I's gwine to de shuckin'
I's gwine to de shuckin'——"

"Good morning, Miss Patty. The top of the morning to you! I thought I'd just come over—— Why, what's the matter?"

Patricia had turned with a start to face Doctor Stafford, who stood under the archway at the top of the garden steps.

"What's the matter, child?" he went on, quickly, as he rapidly descended the steps. "You're as white as a sheet. Why! What the devil——"

His eyes had been arrested by the sight of the ominous paper pinned to the door.

"Good Lord! What's the meaning of this?" he cried, angrily, though his tones were low in deference to the sleeping household.

Low as they were, they reached the ears of the woman in the kitchen and she came to the window nearest to the door beside which they stood.

"Mawnin', Miss Patty. Mawnin', Docter. You-all's suttinly up early dis mawnin'. Ain't hit a gran' day? Makes you bless Gawd you's alibe. Ah tells Sam he misses de bes' part de whole day layin' in de baid de way he do. Sam suttinly do like he baid sho nuff. Sprecially he like dat fine brass one he done gib me fer a weddin' present. You year 'bout dat, Docter?"

"Yes," said Stafford, stepping in front of Patricia so that she was screened from the coloured woman's childlike curiosity. "That was a fine wedding present. You were pretty lucky to get a handsome boy like Sam, Lily." He sniffed the air and added, "Don't I smell something burning? What is it? Hot muffins?"

"Does you, sho nuff, Docter? Law-zee!" And the dark face disappeared, precipitately.

Without another word the doctor drew out the four long pins which held the menacing paper, slipped the paper in his pocket, stuck the pins carefully in the hem of his khaki shirt and, catching hold of Patricia's arm, led her gently up the path through the garden, across the aqueduct and in at his own door. He seated her in a chair and, swiftly

crossing the room, poured out a glass of milk from a pitcher which stood on the table.

"Drink that, my dear, and then we'll talk," he said, placing the tall, thin glass in her hand. "Don't hesitate. Doctor's orders. . . . Now, that's better. The blood's coming back to your face already. Frightened, weren't you?—and no wonder. An ugly thing, anyway you look at it. A practical joke, perhaps, but ugly, all the same. You'd just found it when I startled you so?"

"Yes." Patricia drank the milk eagerly. Her throat felt feverish. She finished it quickly and handed the glass back to the doctor. He placed it on the table and drew up a chair beside her.

"Tell me about it," he said.

"There's nothing to tell," Patricia responded, tremulously. "I turned to close the door—and there it was."

Doctor Stafford took the offending paper from his pocket and regarded it earnestly. It must be confessed that there was, to him, something enlivening in the situation. He had a penchant, which he, himself, often laughed at, for reading detective stories of a somewhat lurid quality and had often amused himself by making abstruse deductions from simple, ordinary facts. He was a careful observer and seldom failed to tickle his *amour propre* with the correctness of his surmises. In spite of his annoyance that so ugly a trick had been played on his friends, he set himself, with a somewhat shamefaced

and unacknowledged enjoyment, to the task of unravelling what he could of the small mystery.

"It looks like wrapping paper," he said, after a moment's consideration, "and it seems to have been cut with scissors. See this clipped piece on the edge. It's clean and sharp. I don't think a knife would have cut quite like that, unless the cut was made along a straight-edge, and the knife had slipped, perhaps. But, you see, that couldn't be, either. The edge is a little wavy—not a straight line. . . . Scissors—hum-m-m—it would seem more natural to use a knife."

"Why, I don't think so," said Patricia. She had been staring at the paper. Now she glanced up at the doctor's face. "It's a great deal easier to cut with scissors."

The doctor's eyes narrowed in thought as he looked at her.

"For you it would be, perhaps," he said, slowly. "I would have done it with a knife."

He meditated in silence for a moment. Then he drew out the four pins from the front of his shirt and studied them. They were long steel pins with black heads and were not all of the same size.

"Do they say anything to you, Miss Patty?" he asked, holding them out to her as they lay on the palm of his hand.

"They look like ordinary pins to me," she said, interested, in spite of her fears, in the doctor's speculations. "Mother uses that kind. The heads are

dull black, you see. They're called mourning pins."

"Possibly some idea of suggestion on the part of the practical joker," said the doctor, slowly.

"Do you think it really was intended for a joke, Doctor Stafford?" asked the girl, eagerly. "Could it have been? And why? Why play such a horrid one—and on us? Who would think of doing such a thing? We know almost no one here except you. Even Uncle Morgan doesn't. Nobody lives here now who lived here when he was a boy. He was speaking about it only last night."

"Of course, it could only have been meant for a joke." The doctor spoke confidently although he was conscious of a slight sinking of the heart. What had he known of Morgan Carrington, really, in the long years which had followed their college days? He had seen him with comparative frequency, it was true. They had kept in touch with each other, but that was all. They had both, until recent years, been busy men. He had had an exacting profession, a most engrossing one. Morgan, before his retirement, had been simply wrapped up in his large building operations. They had involved picturesque incidents, especially at first, when Morgan's capital was slender and he had superintended much of the work in person. Stafford could remember, now, some of the stories Morgan had told of his conflicts with his workmen, conflicts in which he, by his intellect and ruthless force, had always come off

victorious. They were mostly Italians, those workmen. . . .

The doctor looked down at the paper in his hand. Could there have been an old score to be paid off? Had this anything to do with Morgan's recent state of tension—his suggestion that Patty ought to be able to take care of herself in case—in case anything should happen? . . . Who was it under the trees last night? Did Morgan know—or guess? . . . It sounded like a man's footstep. . . .

But there were the pins. Would a man have pins like that? And scissors? A woman cuts paper with scissors, naturally. But a man? Wouldn't a man be far more likely to use a knife? . . . Pins and scissors alike, would be, for most men, easily procurable—probably. . . . And perhaps it was all nonsense—an absurd thought, born of his friend's unaccountable irritability. It seemed to Stafford, in thinking it over, that Morgan had been distrait and nervous for some time. He recollected how often he had seen her uncle studying Patty with an anxious, concentrated frown.

"There's only one thing to be done in any case," he thought to himself, and turned a calm, untroubled face to Patricia.

"It's obviously a practical joke," he repeated, "and an ugly one at that. More than all, it was probably intended for someone else. Some other house, I mean. You hadn't thought of that, had

you?" The relief in her face was apparent. "You see, it was night and the person might not have been very familiar with the locality. There are several big white houses along here, with gardens which have gates on the aqueduct. It would be quite easy to make a mistake. You see that, don't you, my dear?"

"Yes," said Patty, "I see. I didn't think of that. It couldn't have been intended for us, could it?"

"Why, I don't see how it could have been, do you?" asked the doctor, smiling reassuringly.

"No, I really don't," answered the girl, gaining confidence from his apparent lack of anxiety. "But you were worried yourself, at first, weren't you, Doctor?"

"Well, possibly, just at first, before I had time to think," Stafford admitted. "But I see, now, how absurd it was. I'll tell you what," he added with decision, "you'll have breakfast with me. Yours won't be ready for an hour yet, and I can have mine on the table in a few minutes. You'll be better for a cup of strong coffee and it will be a wonderful treat to me to have you to look at while I eat. Just think, my dear, I haven't had a woman to pour my breakfast coffee in my own house for more than twenty years. You will stay?"

The doctor's tone was eager, almost boyish. His clear gray eyes were wise with the wisdom of a wide experience and were filled with the intelligence which

had made of each experience a definite asset. These humorous, understanding eyes smiled into hers. He meant to make certain that the girl was entirely reassured before he let her go.

"It's perfectly darling of you to ask me, Doctor Stafford," said Patricia, "and of course I'll stay. I'm terribly hungry. Isn't it disgustingly unpicturesque? Whenever anything exciting happens to me it always makes me feel as if I hadn't had anything to eat for a week. Even if it's something awfully unpleasant, it's just the same. Isn't it unromantic?"

"Wouldn't sound well in a book, I'll admit," said the doctor, laughing, "but it sounds good to a medical man. It just means that there's no nonsense about you and that your digestion is all that fancy paints. Come into the kitchen and help me. The water must be boiling by now."

"But where's Mrs. Flannery?" asked Patty. "Has she gone?"

"The reign of Mrs. Flannery is over," said the doctor, solemnly. "She has gone the way of all flesh. She said that her neighbours were gossiping about her being here with a personable young thing like myself. I think, if you ask me, that she's saved enough from the princely salary that all cooks get now to take a vacation, and my tears and prayers were of no avail. I can only thankfully believe that it was written by the hand of a beneficent Provi-

dence that she should leave me yesterday so that I might have the pleasure of making you a real cup of coffee this morning."

They had passed together into the low, wide, whitewashed kitchen where the kettle steamed on an old-fashioned range and the sunlight streamed through transparent leaves upon the broad boards of the floor which had been scrubbed for many generations, so that they were of a warm and velvety whiteness.

Patricia ground the coffee, plenty of it, and a few moments later the old man and the young girl were sitting opposite each other at a small table in one end of the long living room, a simple, bountiful breakfast spread between them. There was a ripe orange-coloured melon, which spoke of sunnier lands; crisp bacon curling around the edges of a blue platter of golden scrambled eggs; delicately browned and buttered toast, and coffee sending up an aroma which might have made the envious gods throw away their nectar in disgust.

The doctor talked wittily, charmingly, as he plied the girl with food. He wanted to cheer and calm her and, a little, to calm himself, perhaps. His thoughts kept hovering persistently, like annoying flies, about the slip of manila paper which he had replaced in his pocket. Under other circumstances, he would have treated it with the careless contempt which any anonymous communication richly deserves, but there was something odd, to say the

least, in his old friend's manner of the night before, a nervousness and irritability which, in looking back, Stafford found hard to reconcile with Carrington's customary decisive and self-sufficient character, unless . . .

Of one thing, he was certain. It was best that Morgan should see that equivocal missive. If, as seemed more than probable, it was not intended for him, no harm would be done, but if, by any chance, it should prove to be serious—a warning of some unimaginable and, possibly, preventable disaster, it should not be ignored. It was not for him to judge. The only immediate question for him was, should he show it or should Patricia? The doctor would not willingly put her in an unpleasant position and yet if he, himself, placed it in Carrington's hands, would it not suggest that he felt it to be important and that he wished for an explanation? His great natural delicacy revolted from any appearance of prying into his old friend's affairs, and, after a long debate within himself, he decided that it would be more simple and natural, since she had found the paper, for Patty to show it to her uncle. Morgan could be trusted, he was confident, not to say or do anything to alarm the girl. If the ugly warning was really meant for Carrington, the doctor had a shrewd suspicion that it would not take him unawares. . . .

Doctor S. O. S. glanced up at the old silver face of the tall clock.

"Your uncle breakfasts at eight, Miss Patty, doesn't he?"

"Oh, good gracious!" exclaimed the girl, jumping to her feet. "So he does. And he likes me to be there to pour his coffee, I know. Mother always has her breakfast in bed. I must run, Doctor S. O. S. You don't mind my calling you that, do you? It seems so exactly to suit you. Thank you for a lovely breakfast. Shan't I run back later and help you with the dishes? I'd love to. May I?"

"I'm always delighted to see you, my dear, but don't you have my cookless estate on your mind. I can manage perfectly. I've had to, often. Now, run along and take this to your uncle. He ought to see the way careless people are ornamenting his back door."

He spoke lightly, holding out the offending paper. Patricia frowned at it and took it gingerly.

"All right, Doctor. I'll show it to him if you say so. Isn't it horrid?" And she wrinkled up her short, straight little nose in disgust. "I always did hate practical jokes. But it couldn't have been intended for us, of course." She raised her head suddenly and looked Stuart Stafford in the eyes. "It couldn't, in your opinion, have been meant for Uncle Morgan, could it, Doctor S. O. S.?"

"Why, how could it, my dear?"

His tone was perfectly calm and convincing, but Patty remembered, afterward, that his answer had been evasive.

CHAPTER IV

"IS MY Uncle Morgan down yet, Lily, do you know?" asked Patricia, pausing at the back door to speak to the cook, who stood in the kitchen window. It was so near that she did not have to raise her voice, and Lily replied in the same low tone:

"Ah ain't heerd him yit, Miss Patty, but he's sho to be comin' down in a minute ef he ain't a'ready. Sam's jus' puttin' de breakfas' on de table."

Patricia touched the "Black Hand" warning which she had concealed in the big pocket of her short tan corduroy skirt.

"You didn't hear any one moving outside last night, did you, Lily?" she asked, almost involuntarily, and regretted, at once, her question. She had been used all her life to the easily aroused fears and imaginings of the coloured race, and was not surprised to see Lily's great brown eyes open wide with excitement.

"Den dere was somebody projeckin' roun' yere last night lak I tole Sam, wasn't dere, Miss Patty? He wouldn't beliebe me when ah say dey was, but efn you yeerd 'em too——"

"But I didn't hear any one," said Patricia, hastily. "I only thought——"

"Efn you didn't yeer anybody, chile, why you axin' me is I?" interrupted Lily, shrewdly.

"Why," answered Patricia, uneasily, "I don't know, exactly. It might have been the footprints." She hesitated, not wishing to tell a downright falsehood.

"Huh! Footprints. Yas," said the woman, darkly, rolling her eyes, "What ah'm talkin' 'bout don't leave no footprints, chile. Naw, suh! Yuh just yeers a step outside, en you looks out—en dey ain't nothin' dere. Jes blackness, dat's all. Ah done yeer hit once befo' en ah yeer hit agin las' night. Ah want Sam t' go out en see what hit wuz, but naw, suh! Dat boy ain't gwine risk hissef wid de sperrits, en ah don't know ez ah blame him, nuther. Naw, suh. De fus time ah yeer hit was 'bout a week ago, Miss Patty, en when ah look out de windeh ah couldn't see nuffin—jes black, lak ah sez, en presen'ly a big, old monst'ous black cat jump out o' de bushes en run up de gyarden steps! Dat was nuff fer dis yere gal! No sperrits what kin step lak a man en den run off lak a black cat fer dis chile!"

"What time last night did you hear the noise, Lily, and where was it?" Patty was annoyed to find that her hands were quite cold. The deep, awestruck tones of the woman's thrilling, dramatic voice were getting on her nerves. Of course there had been somebody there last night, there, just where she was standing, and Lily might easily have heard a footstep if she had been in the kitchen at the time,

but it seemed as if any one desirous of avoiding observation would have chosen a later hour.

"Jes arter Sam en me got upstairs las' night," said Lily, replying to Patricia's question, "ah 'membered dat ah'd done fergot de li'l' 'larm clock we allus takes up wid us en ah slipped down de back stairs t' git hit. Ah didn't mek a soun' 'caze I'd taken off ma shoes, en ah yeer dat same step jus' outside de back hall do'. Ah 'membered dat scan'alous beast of a ole black cat en ah didn't wait fer no clock, believe *me*. Ah jus' vamoosed up dem stairs ez fas' ez Gawd'd let me!"

"That's all nonsense about spirits, Lily," said Patricia, firmly. "It was probably someone who had come into the garden by mistake. You mustn't think anything more about it. I'll get Mr. Carrington to have a lock put on the back gate if you're troubled any more. Tell me if you hear the footsteps again." And Patricia went on into the house.

"Um, um! What sperrits keer 'bout locks on gates?" muttered the coloured woman, unappeased. "Efn I yeers footsteps en sees dat ole black cat agin, Mistah Carrin'ton kin put on a lock ef he wants to, but hit'll be fer to lock Sam en me on de outside, too. Yas, suh!"

Morgan Carrington was coming down the stairs as Patricia entered the wide hall. He greeted her pleasantly but Patty thought that his face looked more than usually grave. She was almost sure that trouble and indecision showed in his eyes—a sort of

considering, suspended expression which she had noticed several times of late without thinking much about it. Now, she wondered . . .

Should she show him the paper at once or wait till after he had had his breakfast? It was Sam's voice that decided her.

"Mawnin', Miss Patty. Mawnin', suh. Breakfas' on de table, suh."

The darky's accustomed smile was missing, but Carrington did not seem to notice it as he seated himself at the head of the table and opened his paper. He glanced up from its pages when Patty had supplied him with coffee and noticed that her plate was empty.

"Not hungry this morning, my dear?" he asked, in surprise.

"Yes, I was, Uncle. So hungry that I had breakfast with your nice old Doctor S. O. S. nearly an hour ago."

"So?" assented Carrington, absently. "Very good. Very good indeed. Treat for him, I should suppose. Yes, yes," and buried himself again in his paper.

Patricia waited quietly until she had poured the second cup of coffee which her uncle always took, and then rose and moved restlessly about the room. When he had quite finished his leisurely breakfast, she paused beside his chair.

"May I speak to you a moment, Uncle?" she asked.

"Why, certainly, my dear. What is it?" he replied, raising his eyes to her face.

"Not here. In the library." She spoke quickly as Sam came in to take away the breakfast things.

Carrington rose at once and, without comment, followed her into the small room, half library, half office, at the back of the house. It was his own special den.

"What is it, my dear?" he asked again, closing the door. "Has it anything to do with the talk I had with your mother last night? Because, if it has, I'm afraid we've struck a no-thoroughfare. I spent an hour up in her sitting room after you'd gone to bed, trying to convince her that you ought to have an opportunity of perfecting yourself in something which would be an interest to you all your life and by which you could earn your living if it should ever be necessary, though that's not likely. I can see how bored you must be here with us old people and nothing much to occupy your mind. I've dropped out of the way of society and would be at a loss how to break into it again. I don't believe your mother realized how it would be when she agreed with me that it would be better for you both to come North. I think she had an idea that I had kept up the traditions of the Carringtons and had a host of useful friends. But I'm just an old fogy, as you see. I'd do anything, my dear"—he spoke almost passionately—"to make things better for **you**. I know just how you must feel. But it was

impossible to make your mother see it. She cried, at the last, Patty, and I was helpless. Hydraulic force—one of the greatest in the world," he muttered, disgustedly, as if to himself. "Damn it," he added, irritably, "there's no way of gaining her consent and I can't see any loophole—unless you were to——"

He hesitated so long that the girl was forced by her eager interest to prompt him.

"Unless I were to—what, Uncle?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing. It couldn't be pulled off, I'm afraid," said Carrington, angrily. It was maddening to this self-willed man to be thwarted in anything. He stamped exasperatedly up and down the room and came back to the desk, beside which Patty was standing.

"It wasn't that I wanted to speak to you about, Uncle," she said, seriously, laying her hand on his arm. "It was about something quite different."

Carrington caught the gravity of her tone and dropped into a chair.

"Well, out with it, my dear child," he said. "What is it?"

"Uncle, do you know of anybody who could be willing to play a very ugly practical joke on us?"

Carrington's head jerked up and he looked at her, frowning, curious.

"What do you mean?" he said. "What kind of a joke?"

"Doctor S. O. S. thought that it might not be

meant for us. That someone might have mistaken the house in the dark."

"Go on, child," said Carrington, testily. "Don't beat about the bush. Who was this someone, and what's the joke?"

Patricia, trying not to feel frightened at her uncle's tone, answered at once:

"I found this pinned to the back door of the hall when I went out this morning," she said, and laid the oblong of manila paper before him on the desk.

Morgan Carrington's face flushed a deep red as he looked at it and he brought down his clenched hand savagely on the arm of his chair.

"Well, of all the damned outrages!" he exclaimed, and stopped suddenly. A thought seemed to strike him. He looked at Patty sidewise, sharply, searchingly, as if to read her every thought. Then he sat for a long time, absolutely still, with knitted brows and narrowed eyelids, while the flush ebbed slowly from his face.

At last he raised his eyes from the paper and looked again at Patricia.

"You said something about Doctor Stafford a minute ago," he said. "What was it?"

His voice was strangely altered but Patty could not be at all sure what the change meant. There was a queer little spasm about the corners of his mouth which it was evident he was controlling with an effort.

"Doctor Stafford thought it must have been meant for someone else," the girl repeated.

"You're sure he thought that?"

"Why—why, yes, Uncle. Don't you?"

"Yes, yes. Probably," he answered, absently. "Must have been, of course. Tell me all about it. How you came to show it to Doctor Stafford—and everything."

Carrington listened intently while she told him of the events of the morning, not forgetting to mention that Lily had heard a step outside the kitchen window on the previous night and once before.

"And everything was black when she looked out," he repeated, musingly. "She didn't see a face among the bushes by the house."

It was hardly a question but the girl replied, "No."

There was a long silence.

All at once, Carrington laughed, rather excitedly. "Yes, that's it!" he cried. "Old S. O. S. was right. He generally is. Wasn't intended for us at all. Nothing to worry about, Patty, my dear, nothing to worry about at all. You remember that I said so—and tell S. O. S. Nothing to worry about at all."

Still laughing in that strange, nervous way he rose and went rapidly out into the hall and up to his room.

A few moments later Patricia heard the screen door on the front porch slam and saw her uncle walk with hurried strides down the long drive and turn in the direction of the railway station.

CHAPTER V

LATE that same night Dr. Stuart Ogden Stafford sat smoking and dreaming on his low front porch. He had watched several pairs of lovers, mostly servants from the adjacent houses, loitering slowly along the unfrequented pathway of the aqueduct, and wondered if the beauty of the night affected even their unquickened and unreceptive minds.

"They must take it in at the pores," he thought, dreamily.

He was very tired. The long, unseasonably hot May day had been trying in the extreme. After another short interview with Patricia he had spent most of the morning paying a round of visits in a small and conspicuously unlucrative practice which had sprung upon him out of the unwholesome tenements of the village lying a mile or so to the south of his own purely residential village of Stonehill. It had all started soon after his official retirement from practice. One of the first of the long and often pretermitted succession of women from the manufacturing village, who had been employed to look after him, had fallen upon dark days. When he found out her condition and that she had no

money and no one to attend to her, he had gravely and unquestioningly accepted the responsibility of ushering into the world a sad and unwelcome little life. Since then, he had pursued his quiet way among the needy people and, like the rain of God, had shed benefits upon the just and unjust alike, asking nothing of high heaven but to be of service. Few of his acquaintance knew why he was never to be seen about his garden in the morning hours, and no one, so far as he knew, cared to inquire. But in the narrow, evil-smelling alleys of the poorer town he was known and blessed.

This morning's work had been very exacting and there had been much to do in his garden when he came home. He had spent a busy day and was content to lie back idly in his chair and look up at the moon shining on the great horsechestnut trees beside the old house. The trees were decked out in their loveliest garments and their tall spires of white bloom and broad, fan-like leaves moved softly against the faint gray-blue of the moonlit sky. Quietly, with an almost hypnotic gesture, the long branches swayed and beckoned, swayed and beckoned. Watching them, the tired old physician dozed and dreamed.

How long he had slept he did not know, when gradual consciousness returned. There was a soft touch on his arm. A girl's gracious young figure stood close beside him in the dusk. The moonlight shone through the shimmering white dress which

floated about her. He drew in his breath slowly. It seemed part of his dream.

"Miss Mary," he said, softly, "Miss Mary . . ."

All at once he came fully to himself.

"I beg your pardon, my dear Miss Patty," he said, confusedly, and rose to his feet.

The girl did not stir. There was something tense and unnatural in her pose, something fearful and troubled in her voice when she spoke.

"He hasn't come home, Doctor Stafford," she said, breathlessly. "Uncle Morgan hasn't come home."

"What! Not yet? Why, it must be——" His hand went instinctively to his empty pocket. Then he remembered that he had given his disabled watch to Morgan Carrington the night before.

"It's almost midnight," Patricia cried. "Oh, Doctor S. O. S., what does it mean? We waited dinner for him till late—and he didn't come. He hasn't come home at all or sent us word. He's never done that before. He's always been most careful to let us know if he stayed in town, even to dinner. I've been spending the evening convincing Mother that there was nothing to be alarmed about. I got her to bed, at last, and slipped over here. Oh, dear Doctor S. O. S., what does it all mean?"

The doctor frowned a little in the darkness but answered readily:

"Oh, come, come, Miss Patty. There's nothing in the world to be alarmed at in the fact that an old

bachelor has returned to his accustomed haunts and forgotten, altogether, that he has a large and interesting family who would become flatteringly anxious if he didn't turn up at the proper time." He spoke in his usual quiet manner, but he couldn't help thinking within himself a trifle anxiously, "Why didn't Morgan send them word and why did he stay away to-night of all nights?" It was cruel, after what had happened this morning, to leave his absence unexplained. The alarm which the doctor saw in the girl's face, an alarm perceptible even in the dim light, made him furious, and behind the fury there lurked another feeling which he would not allow himself to analyze.

"He's probably playing poker with some old cronies at the club," he went on without pause, "and has lost all sense of the passage of time. It would be just like him. But he ought to have realized that you might be anxious."

"Oh, I am," cried Patricia, clasping and unclasping her hands. "So terribly worried, Doctor S. O. S., I couldn't think of any reason—any explanation."

"Well, you see that it's simple enough to one who is familiar with his habits," began the doctor.

But Patricia was not satisfied.

"Can't we make sure?" she asked. "I feel as if we must make sure. Do you know his clubs? We might——"

"Yes, he'd be at the University Club or the Harvard Club. I'll call them up at once. Come in,

dear child. We'll soon set your mind at rest. It's too bad——"

Stafford led the way into the dark, quiet house. He switched on the light, placed Patricia in an easy chair and went immediately to the telephone.

Being himself a member of both clubs, he was familiar with the numbers and wasted no time in giving them, one after the other, to the operator. The University Club responded at once. Mr. Carrington had not been there, the boy thought, but if Doctor Stafford would wait, he would make sure. In a moment, the voice came again over the wire:

"No, sir. Mr. Carrington has not been in the club this evening, Doctor Stafford."

There were assurance and finality in the answer.

It took longer to get the Harvard Club, but the answer was the same. Morgan Carrington had not been there.

With a disappointed gesture, Stafford turned back to the girl, who was sitting eagerly forward on her chair. Her face was pale and drawn, her dark eyes filled with alarm.

"Oh, Doctor S. O. S., I had hoped——"

"So had I, my dear. But you mustn't worry. He must be somewhere in town and we'll find him, never fear. Now, let me think. Where would he be likely to go? . . . Oh, I have it! Why didn't I think of it before? If he stayed in town unexpectedly, he'd go back to his old hotel for the

night, of course. He's lived at the Ascot for years. That's where he is, undoubtedly."

He smiled at Patricia reassuringly as he caught up the big gray telephone book and opened it at the front pages.

"Here we are," he said. "Murray Hill ten thousand and two."

"Murray Hill ten thousand and two," he repeated to the operator—and waited.

"Line busy," he added after a moment, hanging up the receiver.

The girl said nothing, but her straight brows drew together in an anxious frown. It was evident that she was retaining her composure with a great effort.

"He's there, Miss Patty. Don't you worry. He's got to be there," said the doctor. "I'll get him on the wire, whether he's asleep or not, and give him a good dressing down for not letting you know. Confound him! What right has he to have a family and to treat 'em like this?" He took down the receiver again. For a moment the operator failed to respond and he clicked the hook impatiently. At last—

"Try Murray Hill ten thousand and two again, please," he said, crisply.

There was a long pause.

"Hello!" He leaned quickly forward. "Is this the Ascot? Connect me with Mr. Carrington's room, please."

Patricia listened eagerly.

"Yes, I know he left some months ago. But he came back to the hotel for the night, didn't he? . . . What? Are you sure?"

"He's calling the desk to find out," said the doctor in a low voice to Patricia. He was beginning to be really alarmed, though he concealed it admirably. He kept the receiver at his ear. After a seemingly interminable wait he said:

"You're sure? All right. Thank you," and hung up the receiver.

"He isn't there, Miss Patty." The doctor's voice was quite calm. "I'm not sufficiently acquainted with his friends to be able to guess with whom he might be stopping and we can't call up a lot of people at this time of night on a bare chance. I'm afraid we'll have to give it up for the present. But he'll turn up in the morning and we'll present him with our opinion of his frivolous conduct, won't we?"

But the girl was unable to respond to the doctor's confident manner.

"If he only comes!" she cried, gripping the arms of her chair. "If he only comes home, Doctor S. O. S.!"

"Sure to turn up in the morning. Sure to," reiterated the doctor. "He's able to take care of himself, is your uncle Morgan. Don't you be afraid for him!"

"I wouldn't be," said Patricia, shaking her head sadly. "I'm not easily alarmed. I'm not a fussy

girl, naturally, Doctor. But think of what happened this morning! That horrid, ugly thing I found on the door——"

"That was just a queer coincidence," affirmed the doctor, stoutly. "You mustn't let that worry you. It didn't alarm Morgan, that was plain. You told me, yourself, this morning, that he was laughing about it when he left you."

"Yes, Doctor S. O. S. He was laughing," said the girl, doubtfully, "but it was a queer kind of a laugh. I couldn't help feeling——"

"Now, my dear child, don't let your imagination run away with you. It's late and you're tired and nervous. What you need is a good night's sleep. Things will seem very different to you in the morning. And when Morgan turns up and is very contrite—— Oh, I'll make him ashamed of himself, you may be sure. You'll be sorry you wasted such a lot of good worry on him. You see, he may have gone to the theatre and supper afterward. In that case he might not reach his hotel till later—or he may go home with one of his old cronies. He's sure to be all right, don't you see?"

"Yes, I see. At least, I see that you're trying to reassure me, dear Doctor S. O. S., and I appreciate all your kindness. Only——"

"Only you're tired, my dear, and I'm going to prescribe a little medicine for you and take you home. Now, you take this"—the doctor selected

a bottle fom a number which stood on the shelves of a large cabinet and shook a tablet into a tiny envelope. "You take this just as you turn in and I'll engage that you get a good night's rest. Now, if you're ready, my dear——"

He guided her gently down through the dim, quiet garden where the flowers nodded in their sleep, and to the door of the silent, brooding house. The darkness in the hall was impenetrable.

"Go up to your room, my child," said the doctor, softly. "I'll stay here till I see your light. Good-night, my dear. Don't worry, and sleep well."

"Thank you, dear Doctor S. O. S. Thank you for everything. I'll try to be good. Good-night."

Patricia quietly ascended the stairs. The doctor, waiting in the darkness, heard a door opened cautiously, saw a faint light shining on the polished wood of the upper balustrade, and was aware of a small, dark head leaning toward him over the rail.

"I'm all right now. Good-night again, Doctor S. O. S.," Patricia whispered.

"Good-night, my dear child," he whispered back.

He crept down the narrow hall, adjusted the spring lock on the door, closed it softly and made sure that it was fast.

As soon as he reached his own house, he went directly to the telephone and called the Ascot again, with no favourable result.

He sat by his shaded light, reading, till his tall old

clock told him that it was half after one, and again he called Murray Hill ten thousand and two.

The hotel operator's answer was somewhat impatient.

"No, sir. I told you so before. Mr. Carrington has not come into the hotel to-night."

CHAPTER VI

IN CONSEQUENCE of his night's vigil, Doctor Stafford slept later than usual on the following morning. He awoke, at last, with a sense of suspended trouble in the air. The sun was already high and shone, hot and sulky, through a heavy mist. The atmosphere was still and close and enervating. While cooking his lonely breakfast, he glanced out of the window now and then, with a feeling of unwonted distaste, at his garden where the weeds had sprung up in the night with a virility seemingly out of all proportion to that of the plants which stood among them.

"Sometimes that garden seems to sit on the back of my neck like an old man of the sea," he soliloquized. "It's really too big for an ancient like myself to handle alone at this time of year, and it's been so impossible to get help. Never mind, Stuart, old boy. You'd be in a bad fix if you didn't have it, mentally, morally, and physically—to say nothing of financially. What would you do in the winter without your 'put-up garden sass'? You're getting lazy, my lad. That's what's the matter with you. Old and lazy." He had formed the habit of talking to himself during the late, solitary years. "Old

and lazy?" he repeated, squaring his shoulders. "Perish the thought! I'll have to take you in hand, my boy. I can see that, plainly."

He took a heavy pair of shears from a nook beside the door, stepped outside, cut a few long sprays of fragrant honeysuckle from the vine which grew above the porch and, returning, placed the flowers in a blue jug. Then he picked up the scissors to put them back in their place. He stood, for a moment, balancing them in his hand before he hung them on the hook.

"Yes, of course, a man might use scissors, I suppose," he thought.

His mind was still running on that "Black Hand" warning and on the other events of the previous day. He did not like to admit, even to himself, that there was any serious cause for alarm but, nevertheless, he had called Morgan Carrington's old hotel again as soon as he awoke; had not even stopped to dress. The answer had been the same as on the previous night: Morgan Carrington had not been there.

"He'll turn up during the day, of course. Too early to expect him yet," said the doctor to himself, confidently, as he took the tray containing his breakfast and the little jug of honeysuckle into his living room. He glanced out of his open front windows before he sat down. Smoke was rising from the chimney of the big house which lay beyond the hedge, but there was no other sign of life.

He had nearly finished his breakfast when he heard

a light step on the old porch and Patricia Carrington looked in at the window.

"May I come in, Doctor S. O. S.?" she said.

"Of course, my dear child."

The doctor rose quickly and met her at the door.

"Come in and have a cup of coffee, Miss Patty. It will clear the cobwebs out of your brain. Did you sleep well last night?"

"Yes, thanks to you, Doctor."

"But you don't feel quite all right this morning, eh? That's the worst of even the mildest form of opiate. One always feels depressed after it. A cup of my coffee will set you up. See if it doesn't," he urged.

"Thank you. I will have a cup. Mine will be ready soon, but Lily can't make it as you do. I've struggled with her and I've been able to get her to measure the coffee, but she says she can't see any reason for measuring the water when we don't have to pay for it."

The girl strove to speak in her usual manner, but the doctor saw that she was holding her self-control in both her strong, small hands. There was nothing to be gained by avoiding the subject which was uppermost in both their minds.

"Too early to hear from that disgraceful uncle of yours," he remarked, casually. "When he does come, I'll give him—what for!"

It was evident that he had elided a stronger expression. The girl smiled.

"Say it, Doctor S. O. S.," she said. "It would be a relief to my mind."

"I'll give him hell, then, saving your presence," said the doctor, laughing. "Worrying you like this! It's a damn shame!"

He felt a distinct relief in the use of the competent words. They seemed, somehow, to bring Carrington's unexplained absence out of the realm of mystery, to make it seem more like an ordinary, everyday happening.

They talked on with less constraint after that, and the old physician had succeeded, with the aid of the strong coffee, in bringing a little colour into the girl's face, when they were both startled by the sound of a heavy footstep on the porch. Someone knocked on the hall door.

"Who can that be?" wondered Stafford, rising to answer the knock. "I don't usually have callers at this time in the morning. Excuse me, my dear."

Patricia, listening from her place beside the table, heard the doctor's voice, followed by a low murmur. She had finished her coffee and now rose and moved idly over to the window.

The doctor was leaning against the door jamb and she could see nothing of him except his shoulder, but the man who had knocked stood in plain view. He was a dark, swarthy fellow, with small, quick black eyes and a broad smile disclosing even white teeth. He was elderly but not old. His short muscular figure retained a look of alertness which contrasted

oddly with his whitening hair. His rapid utterance and frequent gestures conveyed a suggestion of something foreign. He was saying:

"Yes, boss. Jus' laike I tella you. Annaballe, in de village at Harford, de fruit man, yes, sir. He tella me, plenta work here for gardener. He tella me, month ago, in de city—New York—yes, sir. He say, shoe-shine no good in summer. Why I don' come in countree. Get plenta work. Get plenta mon'. Keep cool, too. I t'ink gooda t'ing, me. Yes, boss. Hot weath' come—me for countree, me. Yes, sir." He grinned, cheerfully.

"And Annaballe sent you to me?" asked the doctor. "That was good of him. I've been hoping he could find someone for me. The garden is really getting out of hand. What wages do you get?"

"What you pay?" returned the man promptly, darting a little half-humorous, half-mercenary glance from his small bright eyes. "What you pay, boss?"

"Thirty cents an hour to the last man," answered the doctor, tentatively. He knew that there had been an unconscionable rise in wages during the last year and was surprised at the man's quick acquiescence.

"T'irty cent a hour. Aw right, boss. I work t'irty cent a hour for you. Annaballe say you gooda man. He say you not got mucha de mon'. You spend lot on poor peop'." His smile was very ingratiating. "You tella frien', Marco gooda man, too. Don' tella frien' you pay Marco t'irty cent a

hour. You say, Marco wort' fifty. Yes, you see I wort' fifty, boss. You try. How mucha time you need, boss?"

"Come out and I'll show you the garden," said the doctor. "You can tell better than I, perhaps, how much time will be required. I can't do as much as I could wish, but——"

The two men passed along the porch and around the corner of the house. Patricia could see them from the north window, moving among the growing plants. After a moment the labourer pulled off his coat and dropped it in the shade of a tree. He followed the doctor to the back of the house and soon returned to the garden alone, carrying a rake and hoe. The doctor came back through the kitchen.

"That's a piece of good fortune for me, Miss Patty," he said, cheerily. "I was wondering, this morning, how I'd ever catch up with the weeds."

The girl looked at him gravely.

"He was an Italian, wasn't he, Doctor S. O. S.?"

"Why—why, yes. Most gardeners are, aren't they? We get more Italians than anything else, so near New York." Her troubled frown drew his attention. "What are you thinking about, Miss Patty? You don't imagine——"

"Oh, Doctor Stafford. I don't do anything but imagine!" she cried. "I know it's silly. There isn't anything really odd in this Italian turning up

this morning. Only—the 'Black Hand'—it's an Italian society, isn't it?"

"Why—yes," replied the doctor, slowly. "Yes. . . . It is, of course. . . . I catch your idea. . . . But I imagine any one who wished to convey an anonymous warning—I mean," he corrected himself, hastily, "any one who wanted to play an ugly practical joke—might make use of the well-known emblem. It would add colour to any document, that's certain. It's unthinkable that a pleasant, kindly man like this one—— You saw him?"

The girl nodded.

"Well, he seemed guileless enough, didn't he? And he's gone to work with a will. Look there."

They could see the man who called himself Marco wielding the hoe with a will, apparently entirely unaffected by the hot rays of the sun.

The girl studied the broad back uneasily. The doctor watched her face in silence for a moment. Then he said:

"I'll tell you what, Miss Patty. I'll call up the fruit man in Harford and see what he knows about Marco. If he says that the man is all right, he is, I'm sure. Annaballe would hardly send a suspicious character to me."

The doctor did not think it necessary to mention that he had nursed Annaballe through an almost fatal case of pneumonia late in the winter, that he

had, undoubtedly, saved the man's life. He was not one to parade his good deeds, but he was certain that Annaballe would tell him the truth.

He sat down at once at the telephone and, after a somewhat lengthy conversation, he hung up the receiver and turned to the girl with a smile.

"It's quite all right, Miss Patty," he said. "The fruit man knew all about him. His name is Marco Precioso, and it seems that he is quite well off. Annaballe spoke of him with great respect. Marco is living with him and I imagine his board is a great help to them. It appears that Marco has a fine 'shoe-shine parlour,' somewhere in Thirty-sixth Street and does a good business, but he likes to get into the country in the summer. He's fond of gardening and it makes a pleasant change for him. Annaballe says that he belongs to nice people. That he has a brother who owns a big fruit farm in the back country on the other side of the Hudson. There's nothing to trouble us about Marco. He's a 'kent mon,' as the Scotch say. And, Heaven knows, I need him," he added, feelingly.

The girl was satisfied and dismissed her fear as absurd. The good doctor was more than satisfied as he watched the swift destruction of noxious weeds. . . .

His mind would hardly have been so completely at ease, perhaps, had he known that the plenitude of information which had been so glibly furnished him by the friendly fruit man had been imparted, in

toto, last night to Annaballe from Marco's smiling lips. There would have been, for the doctor, food for thought, had he realized, fully, what a god-send Marco's prosperity was to his needy countryman, and how earnestly the poor fellow (with a large and growing family, spilling out into the street) desired the profitable continuance of Marco's patronage. To do him justice, Annaballe had believed, implicitly, all that Marco had told him. But, though the doctor received the impression that the two Italians were boyhood chums, the fact remained that, until the night before, the fruiterer had no knowledge that there was, in all the world, a man named Marco Precioso.

CHAPTER VII

THE morning dragged on wearily, interminably, it seemed to Patricia. How she longed to hear her uncle's quick, irascible voice at the door; to see the expression of his thin, dark, bearded face change, as it had yesterday, when he caught sight of her.

Not a great many people loved Morgan Carrington. His temper was too uncertain, his nature too self-willed and aggressive. Few had ever believed, as his niece had come to believe, that his gruff, rather hard exterior was a protective shell and that it covered a sensitive, generous, though erratic and possibly quixotic, temperament. Doctor Stafford was perhaps his oldest and best friend, but not even to him had Carrington shown himself as he had to Patricia.

The girl paced restlessly up and down the long porch from which she would catch the first glimpse of him when he returned, as she told herself he would return, if not this moment, then the next—and still the next—until the moments had lengthened into hours, and yet there was no news.

Luncheon time had come and gone. Her mother had appeared annoyed rather than anxious. It seemed, to her, inconsiderate of Morgan not to let

them know when he stayed in town. It was the first time he had done it and she assured Patty that she would see to it that it was the last. Of course, he was free to stay in town, the poor man, as often as he liked. It was entirely against her principles to interfere with the liberty of any man with whom she was thrown in close contact, especially a man like Morgan who, any one with any sort of perceptions could see, was of a restless disposition. It was no wonder, as Doctor Stafford had said, that he should wish to have a quiet game of cards with his old friends now and then. Their uneventful life must bore him terribly. It did her, sometimes. She thanked Heaven that she had always had resources in herself and could manage nicely. But Morgan might have known that she would be worried about him if he failed to advise her of his plans. He, being a mere man, could hardly appreciate, perhaps, how worried. Doctor Stafford was quite calm and untroubled, of course. *He* didn't have delicate nerves. It was very annoying, very unfeeling of Morgan, not to consider her more. Very unfeeling, indeed. . . .

Patricia had listened patiently, but she was thankful when her mother had retired to her room for her afternoon nap—to rest and compose herself. The girl knew that Doctor Stafford had gone to Harford on unavoidable business during the morning, but he ought to be back soon, now, she considered. She looked at her wrist watch, a neat, manly looking

watch which her father had given her the year before.

"Far beyond his means. Poor, dear Father." The thought went through her mind as she noted the time. "Half-past two. I wonder if I might run over to see Doctor S. O. S. for a minute and not risk——"

She glanced again across the lawn, past the thick mass of shrubbery which almost hid it from view, toward the pillared gateway at the end of the drive. There was no one in sight there or on the short space of Broad Road, the principal avenue of Stonehill, which could be seen from the house. Should she desert her post for a moment? She felt that she must talk to someone, someone who could understand. She could not talk to her mother. She had never been able to talk problems over with her mother, never once, in her whole life. She had instinctively, from earliest childhood, joined her father in protecting her mother from every serious care or worry and, at a fairly early age, she had realized that at the same time, she and her father, by this method, protected themselves from interminable and fruitless discussions. Her mother was out of the question, but Doctor S. O. S. . . . He was clever and so very, very kind. Should she——?

"Yas, suh. I think she's on de front po'ch, suh."

Sam's voice came to her softly through the quiet spaces of the house and, an instant later, his black head appeared at the door.

"Doctor Stafford want see you, Miss Patty," it said. "Shell I show him out yere?"

"No, Sam," answered Patricia, remembering instantly that her mother's room was directly above the porch. "I'll come in."

Quickly she passed the butler and met Doctor Stafford at the back of the hall.

"Come into Uncle Morgan's study," she said when they, for Sam's benefit, had exchanged a word or two of polite and careless greeting.

Upon reaching the small room at the back of the house, Patricia closed the door and leaned back against it, spreading out her hands in an appealing, hopeless gesture.

"No news?" asked the doctor, quietly.

"None. Not even a message," answered Patricia in a shaken voice. The strain of her long, lonely waiting was telling on her.

"Come over here and sit down, my child. Let's face the thing squarely." And after she had obediently complied, the doctor went on: "I'm afraid we must admit that something, perhaps not anything very serious, has happened to your Uncle Morgan. It's practically inconceivable that a man of Morgan's methodical habits would have failed to communicate with you by this time if he'd been in a position to do so."

The continuation of Morgan Carrington's unexplained absence had upset all the doctor's theories, and himself not a little, though he strove not to let

his anxiety become too apparent. Viewed in some lights, the situation might be considered grave and menacing in the extreme, but he would not let himself look that way—not yet, at least. Melodramatic things didn't happen to persons one knew. Their place was on the stage and in lurid literature. The strange circumstances had, unquestionably, a simple and everyday explanation. Only—it behooved him, for the girl's sake, if for no other, to find Morgan—and at once.

"I've been thinking things over ever since I left you," he continued, without pause. "Of course, I hoped he'd be here when I came back, but if he were not, I made up my mind that we ought to try at once to—to trace him."

The girl shivered. The word sounded ominous in her ears.

"But where can we begin, Doctor Stafford?" she said. "I haven't any idea where he went, except that he said he was going into town, and the last I saw of him, yesterday morning, was at the gate, where he turned in the direction of the station."

"Well," said the doctor, quietly. "I know of one place—no, two—where he intended to go. He was to have taken my watch to Tiffany's for me—and he said he was going to the bank. Do you happen to know what bank it is?"

"No," answered Patricia. "He always gave me the housekeeping money in cash. I've never seen his checks."

"H-m-m," said the doctor, biting his lip. "I know it's within a block of Tiffany's, but there are so many banks in that section. Makes it a little difficult. I dislike doing it—but I'm afraid we'd better see if we can find his check book. Then we can ascertain, at least, whether or not he went to the bank. Have you any idea where he keeps it?"

"No," replied Patricia, "but I should imagine the desk here—— He did all his writing in this room. I should think——"

"Yes. Probably."

The doctor turned to the desk, a well-made modern affair with a flat top, and tried the top drawer on the left side. He was glad to find it unlocked. Patricia looked over his shoulder as he turned over the papers it contained. They were mostly the daily slips of various tradesmen and were all marked "Paid." There was nothing there of any value.

The doctor closed the drawer, took hold of the handle of the one beneath, and pulled. The drawer remained immovable. He frowned a little.

"It's locked," he said, "and we haven't any keys."

He jerked the handle again and stooped to look at the unresponding drawer.

"Hello," he cried. "This drawer is locked but it has no keyhole. Now that's odd, isn't it?" He turned a puzzled, questioning face to the girl.

"There's a keyhole in the top one, and it wasn't locked," Patty observed, thoughtfully. "And

there's one in the top drawer on the other side, but not in any of the others."

"It seems queer," said the doctor, "because we can get at the contents of the lower drawer by taking out the one above. Makes me feel a little like a burglar."

Suiting the action to the word, he pulled the top drawer completely out—and disclosed a very solid partition below it.

"Now what?" said Doctor Stafford, sitting back in his chair with the drawer on his knees. "I don't feel, at this stage of the game, that we're justified in breaking up the desk."

"Let's try the other drawers first," said Patricia, sensibly.

"Of course."

The doctor fitted the left-hand drawer in its place, but failed to close it completely. He examined the broad centre drawer and the top one at the right without finding anything to his purpose. The two below on that side were fast closed.

"Confound it," he cried and, stooping again, gave the lower drawer on his left a vicious tug. It came open with such unexpected celerity that the doctor nearly lost his balance.

"Well, I am a double-distilled damfool, Miss Patty," he laughed, as he recovered himself. "This must be one of those new patent desks. I've heard of them but I've never seen one. They're arranged so that shutting the top drawer locks the ones be-

low. That's why there's only one keyhole at the top. I might have known when I saw it—but I didn't think. Here, now, we'll see."

They bent over the drawer together and saw, not one check book, but two.

Doctor Stafford drew them out and laid them on the top of the desk. They were exactly alike; the large, business size, made to contain three checks on each page. The cover on each was of mottled paper without any lettering. The doctor opened first one and then the other. They both contained checks on the Carstairs Trust Company, both had been used, but in both there were still many checks remaining. It struck the doctor as odd that there were two current books on one bank and, though his delicacy revolted at the possible indiscretion, some instinct forced him, against his will, to glance through the stubs. Those in the first book, which he hurriedly examined, were filled in for various amounts and the checks had been made out to a number of people, though most of them were briefly notated "Self." Toward the last, extending over the months of April and May, 1919, the amounts opposite the word "Self" were so large that Stafford caught his breath.

He turned hurriedly to the other book. In this the dates were mostly an even time apart, the first of the month and the fifteenth, and extended back somewhat less than two years. At first they were made out invariably to "E. D." and were for

amounts varying from one hundred to five hundred dollars. Then "E. D." vanished from the scene and was replaced by "Brown Brothers," though the amounts were approximately the same. At the very last, for a period corresponding to that in the other book, they were interspersed with stubs marked "M. C.," and the amounts, as the doctor noticed, uneasily, were very, very large.

In each book, at the very last, one check had been torn out and the stub left blank.

"E. D." said the doctor, slowly, still looking at the check book which lay open on the desk before him. "That would be your cousin, Edward Driscoll, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," said Patricia, leaning over his shoulder, "that would be my cousin Ned."

The doctor said nothing more at the moment. He closed the books with a snap and replaced them in the desk drawer.

"Well, we've found out what we wanted to know, Miss Patty. That's one good thing. It was the Carstairs Trust. Now we'll see if he went there."

He forced himself to smile at her, reassuringly, as he looked for the number of the Carstairs Trust Company and picked up the telephone.

The girl was admirably quiet and self-possessed, though it taxed her will to the uttermost. She listened intently to a one-sided conversation.

"Is this the Carstairs Trust Company? . . . Can you tell me, or find out for me, rather, whether

Mr. Morgan Carrington was in the bank yesterday morning and at what time? Yes. Mr. Morgan Carrington. . . . Thank you."

A long pause.

"Hello. Yes. . . . Oh. . . . It's Doctor Stafford speaking, a friend of Mr. Carrington's. . . . He was?—At about eleven? Oh, at about half after eleven. . . . Yes. Thank you very much. . . . Now, do you suppose—I hate to trouble you, but it's rather important—do you suppose any one there knows where Mr. Carrington went when he left the bank? . . . Is *he* there? . . . No, I suppose not. By the way, what is his name? The president, I mean. . . . Bumgar—oh, Baumgarten. Thank you very much."

The doctor turned to Patricia with a supressed sigh.

"You understood, my dear? He was there at about eleven-thirty yesterday morning. He had a talk with the president, a Mr. Baumgarten, and they thought Mr. Baumgarten might possibly know where he went. They couldn't be sure, of course. But Mr. Baumgarten has gone out of town and won't be back till to-morrow. Frankly, my dear, I'm at a loss to know what to do."

The girl's face was quite white. She said:

"Doctor S. O. S., do you think—ought we—to apply to the—police?"

"No, no," said the doctor, sharply. "I think not. Just at present, anyway. He may have met with

an accident and have been taken to some hospital. Though I don't see why they wouldn't have notified you. He must have had papers. But I can't think of anything else. I can find out myself by calling up the hospitals on the 'phone. I know every one in New York that he might be in. I'll——"

There was a knock at the door.

"You in dere, Miss Patty?"

"Yes, Sam."

"De butcher's boy's yere, Miss Patty. Hit am two dolla's en sixty-free cen's."

"All right, Sam. I'll come," said Patricia, rising hurriedly and taking a small purse from the pocket of her smart black-and-white striped sport skirt. "Excuse me, Doctor. I'll be right back."

When she returned, the doctor was still calling hospital after hospital.

No one answering Morgan Carrington's description had been taken to any of them on the previous day.

CHAPTER VIII

GOODA morn', Miss." Through the slanting rays of the early morning sun, Patricia looked up quickly from the topmost row in the garden, which she was carefully weeding, and beheld the smiling, dark face of the man who called himself Marco leaning toward her over the top of the hedge. The tall hedge reached above the man's shoulders, so that his head appeared singularly detached, and, as she had heard no step, Patricia had a queer, creepy fancy that it might have come there by itself. This fancy was partially dispelled by a hand which suddenly shot up above the mass of green and lifted the soft brown hat from the smiling head.

"Too mucha de hard work for girl," it said. "You give Marco job? Doct' Staff' he give me job. I go dere now. Be t'rough t'ree-four hours." The hand raised swiftly three-four fingers. "I come over here den, yes?" The smile was most ingratiating.

"Why, I'm afraid not," said Patricia, hesitating. She had been working for more than an hour and the sun was hot. Marco's experienced assistance would be very acceptable. She had entirely, or

almost entirely, gotten over her feeling of distrust. It was quite a different reason which caused her to say, regretfully: "No, I can manage alone, thank you."

"See, Miss." The man leaned farther over the hedge and spoke eagerly. "I work cheap, me, yes. I work good, too. You ask Doct' Staff', yes. You pay t'irty cent a hour. Dat cheap 'nough. Yes?"

Patricia shook her head. "Not to-day, I'm afraid. I'll speak to Doctor Stafford. Perhaps later——"

The man looked disappointed but suddenly his face cleared. "Here come Doct' Staff' now. He tella you dat me good man in garden. You ask." And with another smile he was gone.

Patricia rose to her feet and straightened her cramped shoulders. Doctor Stafford was coming through the trees at the corner of the old garden. She met him halfway. He was carefully dressed and carried his hat in his hand. There was a question asked and answered in the first encounter of their eyes.—No news.—It was as plain as though each had spoken. Morgan Carrington had gone away on Monday morning. This was the morning of Wednesday, and still no word.

"I'm going into town on the next train," said Doctor Stafford, abruptly. "I've arranged things here so that I can——"

"Your patients?"

The doctor started and looked at Patricia keenly.

"How did you know?" he interrupted her.

"Uncle Morgan told me where you went every morning," she answered. "He knew."

"Wonder how he found out," grumbled the doctor. "I thought I'd kept my double life a secret!"

"'A light set upon a hill cannot be hid,'" quoted Patty, smiling at the doctor's annoyance.

"And I thought I had a particularly large and opaque bushel"—ruefully.

"Fear not," said Patricia, in a thrilling whisper. "Your secret is safe with me!"

The doctor laughed and then sighed. It was the only flicker of the girl's natural gaiety that he had seen for more than two whole days. He had missed it greatly, and wondered when it would make its permanent return.

"Your mother is still quite satisfied?"

Doctor Stafford was not really very much interested in the state of Mrs. Carrington's mind, except as it affected her daughter, but he wanted to make sure that the ruse he had devised on the previous evening had been really successful.

"Oh, yes," answered Patricia. "I haven't seen her this morning. She isn't up yet; but she was entirely convinced. She's still annoyed with Uncle Morgan for telephoning you instead of her that he was called away suddenly on business, but she believes it, all right. You did it very well, Doctor S. O. S."

"My dear, a doctor who has had to do with neurasthenics learns to lie quite easily, I'm sorry to say.

Learns to be something of an actor, too—all in the interest of science." His smile was half apology, half disgust. "I'm thankful my years of training were of service."

"Oh, dear Doctor S. O. S., I don't know what I could possibly do without you!"

"You'd manage very well, my dear, I have no doubt. But it's a great pleasure to have you feel that I'm useful. . . . Now I must hurry or I'll miss the train. I'll call you up as soon as I can, for we may get news at any moment. You keep that in mind, my dear child. We may get a complete explanation at any moment, which will make us laugh at our fears."

But the old physician shook his head despondingly when he was out of sight. All the way in on the train he was racking his brain, trying to think of some explanation which would explain the unaccountable, and failing—failing miserably.

Upon reaching town, he went immediately to Tiffany's.

"Yes," the polite clerk said, referring to his book. "A gentleman left a watch to be repaired for Doctor Stafford on Monday morning." He understood that the watch was to be sent, not called for. He thought that it must have gone, but he would find out; and he reached for the telephone.

The doctor checked him with a gesture. It flashed through his mind, "If Morgan had made arrangements to have the watch sent, then he must have

known that he wasn't coming back. Could he have known—even then?"

The repair clerk was looking at him a trifle curiously.

"It was only a small thing—just a new crystal," the doctor said, hesitantly. "I rather thought that my friend would have it with him."

"We happened to be out of the right size and had to send for it," the clerk explained. "The gentleman who left it was rather in a hurry, I remember. Said he couldn't wait. That we'd better send it."

"All right." The doctor nodded. "Just find out, if you will, please. I'll take it if it hasn't already gone."

He remained lost in thought until a young man appeared with the watch in his hand.

The clerk received it and turned to the doctor.

"Here it is, sir," he said. "This is Doctor Stafford, I presume. Would you mind showing me a letter or card which will identify you? We have to be very careful, you understand." He was courteously apologetic.

"I can do better than that, if Mr. Johnson is in. He knows me," said the doctor.

Mr. Johnson was in, it happened, and at his usual station at the counter beside the door. The ceremony of identification effected and the watch delivered to its owner, the clerk departed.

Doctor Stafford paused to exchange a few words with his old acquaintance.

"Did you see Mr. Carrington when he brought my watch in Monday, Johnson?" he asked.

"Yes, I did, Doctor. I spoke to him as he went out."

"He's looking well, isn't he?" said Stafford, carelessly.

"Why, no, Doctor. You know, I didn't think he looked at all well. He seemed to me pale and, somehow, sort of odd. He started when I called his name and I thought he was very nervous. But it may only have been that he was in a hurry. He was all of that, for he jumped into his cab and slammed the door like—like winking."

Doctor Stafford would have liked to ask in which direction Carrington had gone, but he knew that Johnson was insatiably curious. Also, he felt pretty confident as to which way the cab had driven, and he hurried, himself, along the sidewalk beside which he was sure it had passed.

Arrived at the imposing doors of the Carstairs Trust Company, he sent in his card to the president and, after a maddening delay, was ushered into that gentleman's presence.

The room in which he found himself was as imposing as the entrance, and so dark and lofty as to appear almost threatening. In its midst, at a large table, sat, in lonely splendour, a small, fat, bald man with an enormous hooked nose and little beady eyes which were fixed on Stafford with an unwinking regard.

The doctor advanced to the table.

"Mr. Baumgarten?" he said.

The little man nodded slowly, as an idol nods, and kept his eyes on the doctor's face.

"As I wrote on my card," said Stafford, "I wish to speak to you for a moment concerning my old friend, Morgan Carrington."

"Yes." The thick lips opened just enough to emit the word and closed again like a trap.

"I called up yesterday afternoon and they said you would be here to-day. I'm somewhat troubled about Carrington, and I think you may, possibly, be in a position to help me."

"So?" The monosyllable was distinctly discouraging.

"He had a talk with you when he was in the bank on Monday, they told me. Did he, by any chance, give you a hint of his plans? Do you know where he was going when he left you?"

For the first time there was a faint gleam in the opaque eyes of Mr. Baumgarten.

"Why do you ask?" he questioned.

"Because——" said Stafford, and hesitated. "I may as well be frank with you, Mr. Baumgarten. It will go no further, I'm sure."

Again the silent little man nodded.

"Mr. Carrington did not come back to his home on Monday," said the doctor, slowly. "He has not been back since, and we have had no word of him."

"So!" It was an ejaculation this time.

"Now," said the doctor, eagerly, "will you tell me where he went?"

"I haven't the least idea, my dear sir. Not the least in the world." Baumgarten lifted his hands, palm upward, with an expressive shrug.

"But he was with you for some time," urged Stafford. "Did he tell you nothing?"

"He told me a great deal," said Baumgarten, angrily, "but to your purpose, nothing,"

"You're quite sure? There was no hint in anything he said——"

But Baumgarten interrupted, impatiently:

"What he said was plain enough. He wasn't hinting. He put it in plain English. But it wasn't anything in regard to his plans, except——"

"Except——" prompted the doctor as the other paused.

"Except in regard to his account," said Baumgarten, shortly.

"At least you can tell me, or can find out for me—you must see why I ask—if he had any large sum of money with him. Enough to tempt someone to —to do him an injury."

"I should think he had on him, in cash and negotiable securities," said Baumgarten, slowly, "enough to tempt almost any man to murder him."

"What!" ejaculated the doctor, faintly.

"Yes. And that's all I can tell you, sir," said Baumgarten, harshly. "He severed his connection with the Carstairs Trust Company on Monday."

"You mean——"

"I mean that he withdrew all his securities from the safe deposit vault and drew out in cash—in cash, mind you—the entire remainder of his account and that of his nephew, Edward Driscoll, from whom he has a power of attorney."

The doctor stared, aghast.

"And he gave you no reason——"

"Oh, he gave reasons enough," answered Baumgarten, "but they were idiotic—raving, if you ask me. However, none of them would explain his disappearance. You can take it from me."

"And you can't make a guess?" hazarded the doctor.

"Oh, I could guess, if I liked," replied Baumgarten, with an ugly smile. "But I'd hate to say what I think. His power of attorney was perfectly regular, and we couldn't prevent his taking out his nephew's money. The boy is on the other side, I understand. It was impossible to appeal to him." He waited a moment to let the innuendo sink in. "You ought to be able to size your friend up better than I can," he sneered. "I haven't had the honour of knowing Mr. Morgan Carrington very long. He was a friend of the former president, Mr. Lindsay Forsythe. His account was in the bank when Mr. Forsythe retired, a little over a year ago. It isn't here now. That's all that I can say, and I must reluctantly wish you good morning, Doctor—er—Doctor Stafford."

The doctor rose to the surface with a little gasp,

but under Baumgarten's cold, hard stare, he forced himself to a semblance of composure.

"You will not object to my questioning the door-man?" asked Stafford, coldly. "He might have seen——"

"Ask any questions you like, my dear sir, so long —you'll excuse me. I'm a very busy man—so long as you ask them elsewhere."

The president of the Carstairs Trust Company touched a button.

"Show the gentleman out, Fletcher," he said to the young man who instantly appeared, "and let him ask any questions he likes of the door-man. Good morning."

And Dr. Stuart Ogden Stafford was ushered out of the presence.

The door-man proved to be a large, genial Irishman clothed in spotless gray cloth. He answered the doctor's questions promptly.

Yes, he did know Mr. Carrington well be sight. He'd been comin' there a long whoile, had Mr. Carrington. . . . Yes, he remembered that he was there av a Monday mornin'.

"He didn't spake to me whin he wint out as he usually does," said the man. "Most always he says, 'Moike,' he says, 'ain't ye dead yit?' he says, er some such cheerful wurruds ez thim. But this toime he didn't notice me till I closes the dure av his cab fer 'm. Then he jus' says, 'How're ye, Moike,' an'

sets down 'longside the other man and away they goes down the Avenoo."

"Down the Avenue, Mike?"

"Yis, sor."

"And there was a man in the cab, Mike? You're sure?"

"Sure I'm sure," answered Mike, confidently. "I've seen him toimes enough. He's been wid Mr. Carrington a good few av the toimes he's been here lately."

"Could you describe him?" asked Stafford, eagerly. "What did he look like, Mike?"

The Irishman scratched his head, tilting his gray cap over one eye.

"Well," he began, "I was koinda surprised to see Mr. Carrington wid that koind av a guy. He wasn't no gintleman, he wasn't. Ye kin be sure av that. He wasn't tall, ner yit short, I should say, but I couldn't be sure, y'understand, 'count av him bein' sittin' down in the cab. He wasn't turrible well dressed——"

"But his face," interrupted the doctor. "Can't you tell me something about what his face looked like?"

"Well, now, sor, about a face, it's somethin' funny, don't ye know?" said Mike, screwing up his freckled countenance and regarding the doctor as one student of humanity might another. "Ye must have noticed how it is yersilf, sor. Ye sees a face often an' often an' ye knows it's the same face all roight. I

sees me ould woman ivery day av me loife, an', honest to God, if I was t' tell ye her oies was blue it's as much as iver I'd loike t' swear to. Her hair was yella once, but if it's gettin' gray be now, sure an' I dunno. But, faith, I knows her whin I sees her, an' I know this man, too. Only—well, I ain't exactly sure whether he was loight er dark. I koinda think his face was darkish—er it moight 'a' been the shadow av the hat he had pulled down over his eyes. Somehow I think his hair was loight, but I'd hate to have to take me Bible oath an it."

In spite of the doctor's anxiety, there was a twinkle of amusement in his eye. He often thought that if something funny happened at his own funeral, the hardest part of being dead would be that he couldn't laugh.

"Did you notice anything else, Mike? Anything at all that would help us to find out who this man was? It may turn out to be pretty important."

"Well, I ain't sure whether he was thick er thin —somewhere bechune, I sh'd say." Mike was obviously drawing on the dregs of his small powers of observation.

"All right, Mike," said the doctor, feeling that it was hopeless to pursue the subject of the strange man's appearance. "Tell me something else. Did Mr. Carrington say anything to the man when he got into the cab? Call him by name, perhaps?"

"I didn't hear him say a wurrud, an' that's the truth, sor."

The doctor frowned. "But you are certain that it has always been the same man?"

"Yis, sor," confidently.

"And how long has he been coming here with Mr. Carrington?"

"Let me see. . . . A couple av months, sor, I should say."

Doctor Stafford considered the answer. It had only been within the last two months, he remembered, that Morgan, as his check book showed, had had need of money—in large sums. . . .

"Was this same man with Mr. Carington every time he came to the bank lately, Mike?"

The man shook his head. "Naw, sor. Sometoimes Mr. Carrington come in afut. Then he was alone, I'm sure."

"But the same man was always with him when he came in a cab?"

"Well, I couldn't roightly say always, sor, but mostly, I think. An' it was always the same man, nobody else come wid him."

"Do you think you'd recognize this man if you saw him again, Mike?"

"Sure, sor, I'd know him all roight. Mebbe I couldn't tell ye what, exactly, he looked loike, but you bring him in, sor, an' I'll tell ye if it ain't him, as sure as shootin'."

And with this somewhat ambiguous assurance, Doctor Stafford was forced to be content.

CHAPTER IX

IT WAS with an uneasy mind and a heavy heart that Doctor Stafford accomplished the return journey to Stonehill. The possibilities presented by the facts which he had learned at the Carstairs Trust Company were disquieting in the extreme, and yet, try as he would, the quiet old man could not keep out of his mind a thrill of almost pleasurable excitement. Since he had given up his large, eventful life in town there had been much to interest but little to stimulate him. A long course of idle and amusing reading had prepared his active mind to take up the problem of Carrington's mysterious disappearance with avidity. Had it not been that Carrington was his friend and that his continued absence was a serious matter to Patricia, the doctor would have attacked the solution with a sense of exhilaration. As it was, he was torn with conflicting emotions, the most prominent of which was a desire to be of service to the niece of his old friend.

He had telephoned her as soon as he left the Carstairs Trust Company. The answer to his question was the one he both feared and expected. There had been no word from Morgan Carrington.

Patricia was waiting for the doctor at the Broad

Road gate when he came up from the train and they had a few moments for conversation as they walked up the drive together. The exchange of confidences ceased, however, as soon as they reached the porch for Mrs. Carrington was there.

"You'll come in to lunch, Doctor Stafford, won't you?" said the gregarious little lady. "Patricia has told me that you have no maid and you must consider our house yours until you are able to get one."

The cordial invitation was due partly to Southern hospitality but was extended also because Louise Carrington was distinctly bored and even the old physician seemed to her better than no one. And there really was no one else, though she had hoped, by coming North, for great social opportunities, both for herself and Patricia. So far, the venture had proved an overwhelming failure. One or two ladies of her own age, or older, had called, but Louise Carrington's type cares little for the society of other women, and they offered her no amusement. They didn't even have personable sons to present to Patricia. Yes, it had been a great and unlooked-for disappointment. They might better have remained in Speedwell, though what they would have subsisted on in that quiet old Southern city, Mrs. Carrington did not trouble herself to inquire. And now Morgan had seen fit to absent himself for an unstated period. It was very annoying. Even the luncheon didn't seem to her as good as usual. Patricia must

speak to the cook. Cold meat with one vegetable and a salad and nothing but fruit for dessert was not the sort of thing to put before a guest. She really must mention it to Patricia. Keeping house was good practice for the little daughter and it was sweet of Morgan to wish to relieve her (Mrs. Carrington) of trouble and responsibility, but Patricia must really do better than this.

Doctor Stafford found no fault with the fare which was set before him and, in spite of his preoccupation, partook of it with relish. Patty ate almost nothing, and as soon as her mother had excused herself to take a most-needed rest in her own room, she led the doctor into her uncle's study.

Patricia listened to his story with an anxious frown. The old man told it very carefully, striving to alarm her as little as possible. When he stopped, she said, appealingly:

"Doctor S. O. S., I want you to be honest with me. I want you to tell me everything you know. I can't help feeling, somehow, that you are holding something back. Please don't do it. I'm young, I know, but I've been through quite a lot. Father always took me into his confidence and I'm sure I was a help to him. You see, Mother—well, we always had to take care of her. I'm used to responsibility. From what you've told me, I can't help thinking that Uncle Morgan has met with something worse than an accident—and that we ought to put the whole thing into the hands of the police."

"No, no." The doctor spoke hurriedly. "I don't dare. At least, not yet."

"But, Doctor Stafford, why? There is the strange, rough man who was seen with him. There was that hideous thing we found on the back door—a warning that something dreadful was going to happen——"

"By the way," the doctor interrupted her, "I wonder what Morgan did with that paper. You gave it to him, didn't you?"

"Yes, and he crumpled it up and put it in his pocket."

"I'd like to have another look at it," said the doctor, musingly. "Do you remember just what it said?"

"Yes. It was printed, and the words were, 'Watch out. Your time is come.' I can see it now."

"You're sure you're right—about the first words, I mean? It wasn't 'Beware! Your time is come'?"

"No, no," answered Patricia with confidence. "It was 'Watch out.'"

"Strange," said the doctor. "I should have thought—— But no matter. You were saying?"

"About appealing to the police, Doctor S. O. S. I think Uncle Morgan——"

"It's your uncle Morgan's possible wishes in the matter that I'm trying to consider, my dear," said the doctor, slowly. "I'm going to be frank with you, as you ask. I don't see any way out of it, and perhaps your young brain will find some possibility which I have missed."

He paused for a moment. Patricia waited.

"Did you happen to notice, my dear——" The doctor spoke hesitatingly and began again: "When we were looking for the name of your uncle's bank, we found two check books, you remember, one of which we rightly surmised to be that of your cousin, Ned Driscoll. I don't know whether or not you observed the stubs as I did. Well, Ned Driscoll's stubs were all filled out in the same hand, your uncle's. I guessed at once that Morgan was managing Ned's affairs for him while he's in the army. Ned evidently required a certain amount each month for expenses. This was sent to him direct at first, but later to Brown Brothers, who were, of course, his foreign bankers. That was all plain enough. You follow me?"

"Yes, so far," said Patricia, though the fact that she was puzzled by the trend of the doctor's words was evident in her face.

"Well, besides these checks for current expenses, there had been, from both accounts, large sums withdrawn during April and May. One would naturally have supposed that the money had been used for the purchase of stocks, since the last few years have offered many opportunities for investments. That's what I hoped. That's what I tried to believe when I went to see the president of the Carstairs Trust Company. But——"

"But what, Doctor S. O. S.?" questioned Patricia, anxiously, as the doctor paused.

"I'm afraid, now," said the doctor, sadly, "I'm afraid they may not have been used for that purpose. When your Uncle Morgan left the bank in company with the unknown man, he carried with him, in cash and negotiable securities, not only, so far as I can judge, the entire remainder of his own fortune—but that of Ned Driscoll as well."

The girl sat perfectly still, staring at the doctor for a long moment. At last she said:

"Why—why, Doctor Stafford! You don't think——"

"I don't know *what* to think," answered the doctor, frowning heavily. "I've known Morgan Carrington for nearly half a century, and I've never had any reason to think he wasn't perfectly honourable and aboveboard. But I've known nothing of his private life, really, for many years. I can't guess what his necessities may have been. It's easy for us all to be honest, my dear, when we have no temptation to be otherwise. Necessity is a hard master. Do you—do I—know what we might do under sufficient pressure? No, my dear child, I can't be positively certain that your uncle's disappearance was unpremeditated. There were a number of little things. He asked me to advise you, to be your father confessor, if anything unexpected should happen to him. It was Sunday night. The night before he—he went away. I thought it odd at the time—and I've remembered since—many things. . . . No. Until we have some stronger evidence of foul play, I think

it most inadvisable, for Morgan's sake, to apply to the authorities. He may have some secret. He may be eluding some blackmailing scoundrel. He may——"

The butler's step was heard coming toward them down the long front room, and the doctor paused.

"What is it, Sam?" asked Patricia, impatiently.

"De milk man's done brought de bill, lak Mr. Carrin'ton ask him las' week, Miss Patty. He waitin' fer de money. He say Mr. Carrin'ton say he mus' git hit ev'y week er he wouldn't gwan tradin' wid him."

"Yes," said Patricia, hurriedly, "I know. I'll——" She took her purse from her pocket. "How much is it, Sam?"

"Fo' dolla's en thirty-six cen', Miss Patty," answered the man, referring to a slip which he held in his hand.

Patricia counted out the money. When Sam's footsteps had died away, she still stood looking absently into her purse, her forehead lined with thought.

The doctor spoke on, following the train of argument which the darky had momentarily interrupted. After a short time, he became aware that Patricia was not giving him her full attention.

"What is it, little girl?" he asked, laying his sensitive old hand on hers. "Confidence for confidence. There's something in your mind that you haven't told me. What is it? Maybe I can help you."

With a sudden despairing movement the girl pulled out her purse and emptied the contents on the desk. There were a quarter, two nickels, and a dime.

"That's all the money I have in the world, Doctor S. O. S.," she said.

The doctor stared in his turn.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Just that. I haven't *any* more money," Patricia answered.

"But—but," cried the doctor, "with this big house—and your uncle gone—nobody knows where——"

"I've tried to put it out of my mind," said Patricia, striving for composure. "It seemed dreadful to consider such a thing, with Uncle Morgan perhaps—— Oh, Doctor S. O. S., what am I to do? We have a roof over our heads, but we haven't any credit in the village. Uncle Morgan was absolutely set against my carrying bills anywhere. He said I could never tell how I would come out with the housekeeping expenses. That tradesmen were notoriously dishonest. That the only right and economical way was to pay cash for everything. He gave me ten dollars every morning and we were to have, for ourselves, everything I could save out of it. It was to be our allowance. I did save quite a little, but——"

"Yes?" the doctor prompted.

"But Mother felt that we needed more clothes, and last week she went into town shopping." She

opened her hands and let them fall at her side. "It's all gone," she finished, sadly.

"Well, my dear child," said the doctor, quietly, "it needn't trouble you for some time to come. I haven't a very large fortune, to be sure, but what I have is yours and welcome."

At the loving-kindness in the old man's voice, the girl's self-control vanished utterly. She bowed her head on the desk and sobbed. Stretching out her little hand, she took his and held it fast. With his free hand, he patted her shoulder gently.

"Don't cry. Don't cry, Miss Patty," he said, softly.

"Oh, don't call me 'Miss Patty,' Doctor S. O. S.," she said, brokenly. "All my friends call me Pat."

"All right, Pat," said the doctor, smiling a little. "We are friends, aren't we? More than friends. 'Courage, comrade.' Courage, little comrade. 'The devil is dead,' you know."

The girl wiped her eyes and looked up whimsically into the kind face bending above her.

"Isn't it mean, Doctor S. O. S.? I can't even cry picturesquely! The tears all go through my nose," and Patty blew that charming but offending organ vigorously. "I'm ashamed of myself for being such a baby—but you're so kind."

"Then I won't be kind any more," said the doctor, fiercely. "Tell me, if you please, madam, just how you're situated. The servants, how about their wages?"

"Oh," said Patricia, "they're paid by the month. They came on the twenty-fifth and I paid them last week. They don't get any more until the twenty-fifth of June. I don't know whether I ought to keep them, though."

"Of course you ought," said Doctor Stafford, promptly. "You couldn't run this big house alone —and your mother——"

"I think Mother would just plain die without them," said Patty, soberly. "We had five or six at home, and she thought Uncle Morgan was absurd to imagine that I could run the house with two. But Lily and Sam are very capable, and it's been easy enough——"

"Well, now, let's forget about them. You tell me what you need and I'll make you a regular allowance until we hear from your uncle."

"But, Doctor S. O. S.," said Patricia, slowly. "Supposing—supposing—that we never hear from him."

"We won't suppose anything of the kind," said Doctor Stafford, stoutly.

"Yes, we will, Doctor S. O. S.," said Patricia, firmly. "We'll face that possibility and face it at once. Mother and I can't go on living on your hard-earned money indefinitely. We have no possible claim on you."

"Oh, as to that——" interrupted the doctor. But Patty held up her hand.

"I can't do it, dear Doctor S. O. S. It's out of

the question. I might never be able to pay you back. I must think of something else. If I only knew how to do anything useful! But I'm young and strong and I'm not really an idiot. I ought to be able to do something."

"Of course you can," agreed the doctor, heartily. "It only needs a little thinking out."

The good doctor's brain was working overtime. Could he make her feel that she had a right to the rent of the old house which he had leased from Carrington? It was worth trying.

"In the meantime," he went on, without perceptible pause, "there's my rent, due on the first; that's to-morrow. You'll have that to go on with."

Patricia's face brightened, but in a moment it clouded again.

"Have I any right to that, Doctor S. O. S.?" she asked, after a thoughtful pause. "If Uncle Morgan has—has—well, has gone away with all Ned Driscoll's money, wouldn't everything there is left rightly belong to him?"

The doctor had been afraid she would see that. It annoyed him that his stratagem had been frustrated, but, at the same time, her sense of fair dealing pleased him.

"That would be for him to say, of course," said the doctor, with a faint touch of half-laughing irritation. "Damn it. I wish he was here."

"What sort of a man is my cousin Ned, Doctor S. O. S.? Do you know?" asked Patty. "It seems

queer, though he's only a sort of half-cousin, that I've never seen him."

"I've never seen him, either," answered the old man. "He's been away at school and college most of the time, and I've never happened to run across him in the summer. Perhaps he'll be home soon, now. Lots of the boys are back."

He proceeded to hold out this unknown cousin as a source of hope to Pat, though he couldn't, himself, see how the boy could rescue her from her difficult situation, since he, obviously, was as penniless as she.

The two people, the old man and the young girl, fell silent, each thinking deeply. At last Doctor Stafford said:

"There's one thing I'd almost forgotten, Pat, little girl, and it will tide you over your immediate difficulties. I've owed Morgan a hundred dollars for ever so long. Should have paid it before this. It has nothing to do with the property and I think you can take it with a clear conscience. We'll tell Driscoll about it when he comes and see if he doesn't think it was right to hand the money over to you. I'm sure he will, if he's any kind of a man, and there's no reason to think he isn't. Then we'll plan something for you to do. You ought to keep busy, in any case, or you'll make yourself ill with worry."

The doctor spoke rapidly. He was afraid that Pat would remember his admitted capacity for swerving from the crystal truth.

"I'll just have time to cash a check for you in the village before the bank closes. You mustn't be without funds, Pat, my dear."

And waving aside the girl's grateful expostulations, the doctor departed.

CHAPTER X

I'VE thought of something, Doctor S. O. S.! Oh, I have a beautiful plan!"

Patricia, unheralded, burst into the doctor's kitchen, her eyes dancing with excitement. The old man, with a large blue apron tied about his waist, was washing up after his evening meal. He cocked a quizzical eye at her over his glasses and, smiling, handed her a towel.

"All right, Pat. Let's have the great idea," he said.

The girl picked up a glass mechanically and wiped it round and round.

"I could hardly wait to tell you," she said. "I thought of it at dinner and I could scarcely eat at all. I've left Mother reading to improve her mind. She'll be asleep pretty soon. I won't have to hurry back. Oh, Doctor S. O. S., I think I know something I could do!"

The doctor, who had finished washing the dishes, picked up another towel and proceeded to dry them.

"I'm listening with absorbing interest and two large ears," he said.

"Well, Doctor S. O. S., it's just this. You know I haven't been taught to do anything worth while.

I can't even sew for sour apples. Look at these buttonholes"—her tone was one of utter disgust—"I made 'em. Did you ever see anything like 'em?"

The doctor gravely inspected the buttonholes in the front of her white dress.

"They seem very handsome to me," he said, seriously. "I always did admire long lashes."

Pat laughed. "Just what they look like; the sort they put on Kewpie dolls. They're dreadful, and the very best I could do!"

"Well, they answer the purpose, I should think."

"I can use them. With these big buttons they're nearly all covered. But you can see that I couldn't earn my living by sewing."

"Uh-m-m," said the doctor, "possibly not, possibly not."

He was pleased to see his little comrade looking so much more like herself. The very thought of a real occupation had acted like a tonic and dispelled, for a time at least, the anxious depression with which she waited from moment to moment for the news which did not come. For more than a week they had waited; hoping against hope; chafing against inaction but seeing no profitable method of procedure; fearing, too, that any action might be a false step.

Patricia proceeded eagerly:

"I believe I thought of everything in the world that any girl has ever done before this to earn a living, and at last, the most obvious thing came

knocking at my stupid brain.—Oh, dear!" she broke off, as the doctor took the glass, which she had been rubbing all this time, from her hand and placed it with the other dishes on the dresser shelves. "You see! I've let you do everything! It's disgraceful!"

"Not at all," said the doctor, laughing, as he led her into his big, comfortable living room. "If I had an idea the size of the one you are so carefully keeping from me in my head, there wouldn't be room for anything else. I can see that. Now, sit down, Pat, and tell me what it is."

"Well, Doctor S. O. S., it's just this." Pat leaned forward, her clasped hands between her knees.

"I think you said that once before, Pat. Come out with it. What are you afraid of?"

"Oh, I'm just scared to death, Doctor, that you may not approve of my plan. Mother wouldn't, of course, but then I think we can fix it so she'll never know. She hates motors—never went out driving with us at home nor since we've been North."

"Now, look here, Pat," said the doctor, impressively, "if you don't satisfy my burning curiosity in just about a minute, I'm going to have a heart attack. I can feel it coming on. My pulse is away above normal now. What has your mother hating motor cars got to do with the plan?"

"Why, don't you see? I can pretend I'm going for a drive by myself every afternoon and she'll never suspect——"

"What? In the name of pity, cut my misery

short!" cried the doctor, waving his open hands in the air.

"That I'm running a taxicab!" exclaimed Pat, triumphantly.

"A taxicab," groaned the doctor, faintly. "Of all the——"

"Now, don't say it's absurd and impossible, dear Doctor S. O. S.," cried Pat. "It's the one thing I really know how to do. I took a course at Speedwell and got a chauffeur's license, so that I could drive for the camp. Some of the older girls among our best people were doing it, and Mother let me, too. Father was all for it, of course."

"But running a taxi is a very different affair," objected the doctor.

The idea appealed to the undying spirit of adventure which still made itself felt in the old man's heart, but he strove to be cautious for the sake of his little friend.

"I know it's different," assented Patricia, "but it isn't any harder work, and I can do it easily—oh, easily. I've thought it all out. There's the car, eating its engine off in the garage. Uncle Morgan said it was mine to do anything I liked with. There's a big tank of gasoline that's just been filled. I can run it a long time without any extra expense. And you know that the cab service here is simply impossible. And the hills are so steep! Millions of people would ride up if the cabs weren't so hard to get."

"Perhaps not millions," said the doctor, "but many people would, of course."

"I'd wear the khaki suit I used at Speedwell," Pat hurried on, "and a small, plain hat. And I have a pair of big driving glasses that cover my face up so that it would be hard to recognize me. Practically no one knows me here anyway. I'll just put a 'To hire' sign on the car after I get near the station and I'll meet all the afternoon trains and just make money, hand over fist. They charge fifty cents for one passenger. I always thought it was too much for the distance, but it seems a heavenly sum now. The car being a sedan body makes it practical for all weathers. Oh, Doctor S. O. S., it is a good idea. Isn't it?"

She was so happy and enthusiastic that the doctor could not bring himself to throw cold water on the scheme. Besides, he was not the sort of man to be deterred from doing anything which seemed to him right and desirable by the consideration of what Mrs. Grundy—fat and comfortable and conventional—might think. The scheme, as Pat outlined it, seemed feasible, practical, and could hardly fail to be remunerative. Also, the doctor thought, it would be great fun.

"My dear, you'll have to let me think it over," he said, slowly; but his tone was so little discouraging that Patty jumped to her feet.

"Oh, you will let me do it, Doctor S. O. S.! You will help me!" she cried.

"You must give me time to think it over," he stipulated. "I promised your uncle to keep an eye on you. And I'd sort of thought out a little plan of my own—only, it wouldn't be quite as sudden as yours. You see I can make the most de-lumptious preserves and pickles and things. I was going to propose that we go into partnership. Put up the fruits and vegetables from both gardens—I can sell them all, I know—and we could divide the proceeds. We could begin on the strawberries. They ought to be ripe in a couple of days, and you've any quantity."

"Oh, Doctor S. O. S., you are a brick! I never had a better pal—except my father," she added, softly. She was silent a moment, then went on: "But why couldn't we do both? I'll have lots of time. I think it's only the late afternoon trains that it would pay to meet. I can stand it all—all this fearful uncertainty—so much better if I have something to do every minute."

"Yes, Pat. It's perfectly true," said Doctor Stafford, gravely. "If you're occupied, heart and soul, you won't have time to worry about—about your poor uncle. I've been thinking of him almost every minute, too. I can't be satisfied to do nothing, and yet, I don't know what to do. I need advice. We both need the advice of someone who understands about this sort of thing—and I think Franklin Thornton is the man who can help us, if any one can. He's an old friend of mine—and of

Morgan's. He's done some of Morgan's legal work, I know, for he drew up the lease for this house. With your permission, I'm going to see him to-morrow and tell him the whole story. He's to be trusted, in any case, and he'll be able to advise us. What do you think?"

"Oh, by all means, Doctor S. O. S.! The thought that Uncle Morgan may be—— Oh, I can't bear it! And we doing nothing—nothing!"

"Yes, yes," said the doctor. "That's the way I feel. I'll go in to-morrow.—Now"—his tone changed—"now, mind, I haven't agreed to this taxicab business, but—how big do you think that 'to hire' sign ought to be? I think I have some cardboard."

"Doctor S. O. S.," said Patricia, solemnly, looking at him with shining eyes, "I think you are the very nicest man in the whole wide world!"

"I haven't said, 'Ready, on your mark,' yet, you know," said the doctor, producing a large square of cardboard. "Remember that!—Now, how big? We don't want to be too modest, but it mustn't be large enough to look hysterical. About like that. Hum-m-m—yes."

He took a glazed picture from the wall and laid it on the table. Placing the cardboard on it and a brass-edged ruler on top of that, with a sharp penknife he cut out a neat card of the desired size. Then, with great care, he lettered on it the words, "TO HIRE," and viewed his handiwork with pride.

"It's beautiful, perfectly beautiful!" breathed

Patricia. "There never was so wonderful a cab sign before in all the world!"

"Not bad. Not bad," said the doctor, modestly. "Now here's a box of wafers to stick it on with. Better take the whole box. You'll have to get it off every time before your mother sees it."

"Yes. I'll be careful," said Pat, gleefully, taking the box and the small placard. "Oh, I am so grateful to you, Doctor S. O. S.!"

"But I haven't given my consent yet," the old man repeated.

Pat grinned, a little mischievous, boyish grin.

"I'm all fixed, though," she said, hugging the card, "and I don't exactly see how you're going to stop me. I'll hide it in the car and I have the key to the garage. You can't get it back unless you use brute force and, oh, Doctor, dear, I know you're too much of a gentleman to do that." She laughed up into his twinkling eyes. "I must run along now, before Mother misses me. Good-night, Doctor S. O. S., and thank you and thank you and thank you."

"I'll go down through the garden with you and see you into the house," said the doctor, smiling at her enthusiasm, but secretly feeling a thrill of sympathetic excitement.

"Come on, then," said Pat, and linking her arm in his, together they went out into the starry night.

As they crossed the aqueduct, the doctor stopped suddenly and slapped his forehead.

"Why didn't I think of it before?" he cried. "I

have an idea! I, even I, Pat, have an idea of my own."

"Impossible!"

"Seems to be, doesn't it? But here it is—sprung full grown, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter. You know of my double life, my child. If I help you with yours, why shouldn't you help me with mine? It's a long walk to Harford, at least it seems long in this hot weather. Why won't you let me hire the car and its chauffeur to make my rounds? I would have done it before, only it's so difficult to get a cab here, and I can't afford a car of my own."

"Oh, Doctor, dear, if you'll let me take you it will make me so awfully, awfully happy—but—but I can't let you pay, you know."

"What sort of talk is that for a business woman?" said the old man, sternly. "You'll never get on if you let people ride free. Just you remember that. Seriously, Pat, it would be a great help and service to me if you could arrange to take me over to Harford, mornings. I was pretty well done up when I got home this morning. You see, I'm getting old—and those poor people depend on me. I haven't many patients. It wouldn't take more than an hour or so."

Patricia was delighted to take him, and the doctor was adamant about paying, so that, after some discussion, they agreed on a price and the old physician was relieved to know that she would have a little assured income, however small.

This matter being settled, they passed down through the garden and Pat turned in the direction of the garage.

"Help me hide the placard now," she whispered, with the air of a conspirator. "I don't dare to take it into the house."

The doctor grinned and nodded. He was renewing the days of his youth.

They avoided the light shining from the back door which Patricia had left open, and from two of the kitchen windows, and crept on tiptoe around the corner. They had to pass very near the kitchen entrance and moved cautiously, for they inferred, from the light in the windows, that Lily and Sam had not yet retired. In a few steps they gained the garage and Pat unlocked and pulled open the door, which moved quietly on well-oiled hinges.

A whispered discussion took place when they were inside. Patty wanted to light a match and see how the sign would look on the windshield, but the doctor's superior caution prevailed and she was speedily induced to hide it under the front seat and to come away.

The doctor pushed the door to softly and, as softly, Pat locked it. They had turned in the direction of the house when she caught the doctor's arm.

"What's that?" she whispered, pointing toward the kitchen window.

Silhouetted against it was a dark head in a soft round hat.

As they looked, the light in the kitchen was suddenly switched off. Stafford sprang forward. There was a faint crashing sound in the shrubbery, the swish of parting leaves, and, for a second, a dark blot appeared, moving rapidly above the smaller bushes down near the drive. Then, swiftly, it disappeared—and the night was calm and still as before.

Patricia clung to the old man.

"Don't—don't go after him," she panted. "You could never catch him, and it would do no good. Oh, what is it, Doctor S. O. S.? Why is someone watching the house? What does it all mean?"

"I don't know, Pat. I can't imagine. I wish I could! Morgan gone—and the money—I can't see—— But I don't feel right about your being here alone."

Patty laughed, tremulously.

"Mother wouldn't feel complimented, I'm afraid, Doctor S. O. S., to say nothing of Sam and Lily. I wonder if they saw."

"I don't think so or there would have been an outcry. Lily would have screamed her head off—been sure to. But I don't think they're much protection."

"You needn't fear for me, Doctor," said Patricia, quietly. "I'm not easily frightened and, in some ways, I can take care of myself. I have a good automatic which belonged to my father. I know how to use it. He taught me. And, if anything occurs to make it necessary, I will use it. I promise you."

CHAPTER XI

AND that's the whole story as far as I know it, Thornton," said Doctor Stafford, leaning back in a leathern armchair and lighting a fresh cigarette. "The whole preposterous, impossible story—impossible, at least, in connection with Morgan. I can't think, somehow——"

He paused, looking into the plain, inscrutable, thin face of the lawyer who had been his friend and Carrington's for years.

Franklin Thornton shook his head and frowned. He had been leaning forward on his desk, his long, bony hands clasped under his chin. He had not spoken once during Stafford's long revelation—if such it could be called when so many of the principal facts were totally inexplicable—but had watched his friend's face with concentrated gaze. His thin, somewhat humorous lips were closed in a straight line. He opened them now with an almost visible effort, as if his long training in keeping his own counsel had somehow interfered with their mechanism.

"It's an odd thing, a very odd thing indeed, Stuart," he said. "I had no notion—no idea. I can't think, even now, that it's possible—that Morgan could do anything dishonest, I mean. For

that's what Baumgarten was more than hinting at. Morgan had a good-sized fortune of his own, or so I always supposed, and what could he be wanting with the boy's money? They were always great friends. Ned was fond of his uncle, I know from my own observations, and I should have said that Morgan cared for him more than for any one else in the world, though a man of his sort doesn't show his feelings openly. I have reason to know that Morgan meant—— Well, I can only tell you that I drew up Morgan's will some time ago. He meant well by the boy. I can tell you that much."

"Then what could have induced him——"

The lawyer shook his head again.

"What induces people to do the sort of thing we hear of their doing every day? I don't know. Some crotchet of the brain, perhaps. Some unexpected combination of circumstances. Some impulse. Only it wasn't a sudden impulse with Morgan; nor was it wholly unexpected circumstances, I think we may say, which caused him to disappear."

The doctor looked at Thornton in surprise.

"Why do you say that, Frank?" he asked, astonished.

"Because," said the lawyer, slowly, "Morgan Carrington was in here on Monday, the twenty-ninth of May."

"You didn't tell me that," exclaimed Stafford, somewhat nettled. "Why, man, that was the very day—— Why didn't you tell me so at once?"

"I wanted to hear what you had to say. And I know very little, very little, indeed. I don't know any more than you where he went or what he did after he left me."

"At what time was that?"

"At about half after ten, I should think, or perhaps nearer eleven."

"Then he must have come here direct from the station. And what did he want, Frank? Good heavens, man, don't you see I'm on pins and needles? Why do you think——"

"That he expected something to happen, something that might keep him out of the way, perhaps for some time? Well"—reluctantly—"I'll tell you. I think I must tell you, though I'm not sure——"

"Oh, go on, Frank, for God's sake. I'm as much interested in Morgan Carrington as you can possibly be and I only want to do what will be for the best. I can't act intelligently if——"

"Yes," Thornton interrupted, quietly, apparently in no wise affected by the doctor's vehemence. "I think it's only fair to tell you that Morgan came in here that same day to add a codicil to his will."

"Yes, yes." For a moment the doctor almost hated his old friend for his deliberateness of speech.

"It was a proviso," Thornton continued, evenly, "that in case of his disappearance—Morgan's, you understand——"

"Oh, heavens, yes. Of whom else are we speaking?"

"Well, in case of his disappearance, his will is not to be proven, no matter what evidences of death are brought to light, for one year from that date; namely, the twenty-ninth of May."

The doctor dropped back in his chair.

"Why—why, then," he gasped, "he intended—or he must have foreseen—or planned to go away——"

Thornton raised his hand and shook his long forefinger at the doctor.

"Now, don't go jumping at conclusions, Stuart," he said. "Don't go off half-cocked. There are at least two hypotheses, perhaps more. Probably more. We don't know the circumstances, not all of them, anyway. Let's consider what we do know and what they point to. He may have planned to clear out with his nephew's money and live a gay life somewhere. From what we know of the man, that seems absurd. But how much do we really know? Then, on the other hand, he may have some secret. Some enemy who has been—blackmailing him, we'll say—and he may have planned to lie low in hiding somewhere. I must confess, in view of Morgan's character, this seems to me almost equally absurd, but these two are the only alternatives which present themselves to me as possible. He was always an odd fish, was our friend Morgan. Impulsive, self-willed, quixotic, overbearing—oh, you know him well as I do. He never took me much into his confidence about his private and intimate affairs. You, perhaps, know more."

"No. I don't believe I do. I can't imagine what kind of a secret——" The doctor remained silent for a long time. At last he said, "Thornton, did you ever think Morgan had any—did you ever know of any old love affairs he might have had?"

It was the lawyer's turn to be astonished. He looked at Stafford as if he feared for his sanity.

"Certainly not," he said, with conviction. "I should think that Morgan Carrington was the last man in the world to be mixed up in any complication of that kind. Why, in heaven's name, should you suggest anything so ridiculous?"

"Well, as far as I can see, we have nothing but absurdities to deal with," said Stafford, doubtfully, "and it occurred to me. I can't, somehow, get it out of my mind that that miserable paper that his niece and I found on the back door was put there by a woman. You know those long black pins—I told you about them."

Thornton nodded.

"What sort of a man, I ask you, would have that kind of pins? They stick in my mind as only that particular brand of pins could stick." The doctor wriggled in his chair as if he felt their sharp points. "I thought so much about them that I went into a shop to see how they're put up; how they're sold, you understand. I found them easily enough. It seems they're very common. But this particular kind, graduated in size, come only, so far as I could ascertain, in a paper cube about two and a half or

three inches across. Can you imagine a man having a thing like that?"

"No," said Thornton, interested in spite of his better judgment. "I can't, and that's a fact. But many men have wives and most of those who haven't have mothers or sweethearts. The pins would be easy enough to get."

"Yes, yes, of course. I understand that," said the doctor, absently. "Perhaps I wouldn't have thought so much about it if—— You know I told you that Patricia and I saw someone watching the house last night. It was very dark and I couldn't be at all certain. I didn't say anything to her about it—but—somehow, I had the feeling—I can't say just why—that the head we saw against the kitchen window wasn't a man's head. If it was, he had very thick hair that stuck out unusually far in the back. And I had the impression that the face was veiled. The light in the house was turned out just as I jumped forward, but the face was turned toward me, I'm sure, for the merest fraction of an instant; and yet I didn't see a face at all. It was all black under the hat."

"A mask, perhaps," hazarded the lawyer.

"Yes, of course, it could have been," returned Stafford, doubtfully. "My whole idea seems ridiculous in connection with Morgan's age and character."

The two men lapsed into silence. At long last the lawyer spoke.

"Well, Stuart, it beats me, I must admit. I can't understand. There are so many things about it which seem impossible. But there's one thing that I think is pretty clear: until we have better evidence that Morgan didn't go away of his own volition—that he isn't staying away of his own free will—we ought to keep everything we know to ourselves. There can no good come to him from our starting an inquiry when we have no idea where it will lead, since there is every probability, according to my experience, that he is alive and well. In cases of disappearance of grown persons, and especially men, 90 per cent. of them are discovered to be voluntary. I have told you that I have reason to think that he at least strongly suspected what might happen, and his provision seems to indicate that he hoped, sometime within the year, to return. One can't say for certain, but it looks that way, doesn't it?"

"Yes," admitted the doctor. "Yes. It looks like that. Only, mightn't it mean, perhaps, Frank, that if the will were proven before the year was up, the beneficiaries might be in some sort of danger?"

"Now you're getting into the realm of romance—of mere guess work, Stuart—and I refuse to follow. The will couldn't be administered, in any case, without sure proof of death, and, at present, there's nothing of the sort. All we have to do is to sit tight and possess our souls in patience. It's my opinion, and I state it with confidence, in spite of your warnings, strange men in cabs, and masked villains watch-

ing the house, that Morgan knew what he was doing when he went away and that he would thank no one for putting the police on his trail. That, for some reason best known to himself, he thought it necessary to disappear. Whether his reasons were wholly innocent—well, it's not our province to inquire or to judge any man. But I think you must agree with me that, for the present, your only course is to let sleeping dogs lie. If there are any further developments, we can reconsider our plan of action—or, rather, of inaction."

"Yes," said Stafford, after another long pause. "Yes. I'm sure you're right—for the present. I'm only thinking of Patricia, Morgan's niece, you know. The suspense is telling on the child. She's a little brick, though. Just as full of pluck and courage. I wish I could take some news to her—some good news. Poor little girl."

But the subject of Doctor Stafford's fears and concerns was less unhappy, just at that moment, than he would have thought possible. She had thoroughly enjoyed making rounds with him in the morning. It had served to distract her mind and had awakened new interests and increased, if that were possible, her admiration and affection for the little doctor. He had taken her into some of the hopeless homes within which he seemed to bring the light of a brighter day, and his manner toward the ill and needy was so gentle, yet so firm and purposeful, that Patricia

felt that she had never seen anything at once so simple, yet so kind and effective. The thought of his serene, capable beneficence had been with her all the afternoon as she worked in the garden, enveloping her with a feeling of protection and comfort. It was with her still while she rapidly bathed and dressed and prepared to enter on her new and exciting career. She was sorry he had not yet returned as she viewed herself in the glass. She felt sure he would approve of her business-like appearance.

It was, indeed, a smart, self-reliant little figure which took its place, a few moments later, at the wheel of the plain but very presentable car which Morgan Carrington, some time before, had added to his ménage.

The car swung out of the garage, slipped silently and swiftly down the drive, and turned in the direction of the railway station.

When she had reached a bend in the road, Patricia stopped the machine, adjusted her big motor goggles, affixed the "To hire" sign to the front glass, and, outwardly calm, but with racing pulse, slid into the parking space alongside the station.

It was time for the four-ten up train, but Patricia noticed with satisfaction that there was only one taxicab waiting. The driver eyed her and her car with evident surprise, but there were several private motors between them and the taxi-driver did nothing more annoying than to stare.

In a moment the train pulled in. Patty's heart

had been beating rapidly before, but it now seemed as if it must be a small, overworked triphammer which had taken shelter in her breast. She was, however, in spite of her youth and inexperience, a girl of great courage and self-command. She also had good powers of observation and an undeveloped histrionic talent and it was with the apparent ease and nonchalance of an old hand that she stepped from the machine and held open the rear door. She could not bring herself to make the customary gesture of the waiting cabby, arm thrust out and finger extended, but contented herself with putting on what she hoped was an alert and confident manner, trusting to Doctor Stafford's cleverly lettered sign to do the rest.

Quite a number of persons descended from the train. Most of them, at that hour, were women, and they, one and all, looked at her curiously and passed on, either to the private cars or up the steep footway. The men, comparatively few in number, glanced at her sidewise as they passed and turned and looked again. One man started to speak to her, thought better of it, and, with another backward glance, began to climb the long ascent.

Pat's heart went down, down, down. Wasn't anybody going to accept a perfectly good opportunity to ride in a decent cab up that awful hill? What was the matter? Was it herself or the car? The comfortable sedan really did look too prosperous and undefiled for a taxi, but there was the placard, staring

everybody in the face. Couldn't they take a hint? Was it going to be necessary——

"Is this car really for hire and are you the chauffeur?"

Patricia turned quickly and found herself looking into the jovial red face of a stout, handsomely turned out man, by whose side stood a slender, anæmic young girl.

"Yes, sir," answered Pat, promptly. She wanted to touch her hat but concluded that that would be carrying her imitation too far.

"Well, this is a great piece of luck," said the jovial gentleman. "Cabs awfully few and far between in this God-forsaken town. Are you sure you can drive?"

Patricia drew herself up a little but answered as promptly as before, "Yes, sir."

The man looked her over appraisingly.

"All right," he said, crisply. "Get in, Hilda. Number fourteen Rosemary Road." This to Patty. "You know where that is?"

The girl hesitated.

"I'm afraid I don't, sir. I'm rather new, you see."

"Yes, hum-m-m, yes. I should think so," said the man, settling himself comfortably in the rear seat. "Almost perfectly brand new, I should say—and the car, too. Well, drive on up the hill and I'll tell you where to turn. Nice little car you've got. What is it?"

"An Orcutt," said Patricia, quietly, without taking her eyes from the road ahead.

"Never heard of it. Never heard of it," said the man. "Left here. O. K.—No, never heard of the Orcutt. American car, I suppose. Yes, hum-m. None of the domestic cars any good. Wouldn't have one myself. Been better if I had, maybe. But I can't bear the damn things."

"Father!" protested the girl by his side. She spoke as if from habit, with no apparent idea of effectively curbing the language of her rubicund parent.

"Well, I can't bear the damn things, and you know it, Hilda. If I could, would I be without a car all this while—would I? Stripped the ring gear of my Fiat," he explained to Patricia, "and will have to wait a month or more to have a new one made. Not a part's come into the country all through this infernal war."

He talked on at a great pace, though Patty hardly listened, except to the directions which he interrupted himself to give from time to time as, smoothly and steadily, they climbed the winding road. She was wondering if this, her first customer—if that was the proper term—might not be made a permanent one. In her inexperience, she hesitated about broaching the subject and was still trying to hit upon a correct form of words when the man said, suddenly:

"Here we are. White house on the right."

And Patricia brought the car to a standstill in front of a large, would-be Italian villa, with thin-

faced arches and a roof so red that it looked as if it must hurt.

"Very good. Very good," said the man, alighting. "How much d' I owe you?"

"One dollar," said Pat, confidently.

"Still very good," returned the man. "Last robber charged one-fifty, but we won't quarrel about that," and he handed her a crisp one-dollar bill. "Now, let me see"—he stood with one foot on the running board—"are you planning to meet trains regular?"

Pat nodded.

"Well, that sounds good to me," said the jovial gentleman, more jovial than ever. "How'd you like to come for Hilda and me every morning at, say, eight-twenty—and meet this train at night? Not Sunday, of course, and only one of us on Saturday. Hilda's going to school in town. Art foolishness, but her mother likes it. What'd you charge by the week?"

Patty made a mental computation. She wasn't especially good at what she had called, in her earliest schooldays, "standin'-up 'rithmetic," but under the present stern necessity, she achieved what was, to her, a lightning calculation.

"That would be eleven dollars at my regular price, wouldn't it?" she said, and saw by the man's eyes that her statement was correct. "Well," she added, "since it's a regular job"—she had this from Doctor S. O. S. and felt that it sounded well—"I'll

take it for nine. I think that would be fair, don't you?"

"Fair in more ways than one." The man laughed heartily at his small joke. "My name's Turnbull, William Turnbull. Then you'll call for me—us, I mean—at eight-twenty to-morrow? That's very good."

Patricia met with varying fortune when she returned to the station. On one train no one seemed to want her at all. The next, a somewhat overdressed young man selected her to drive him up to Elmwood Manor, and Pat was afraid, from his appearance, that he might prove objectionable. His timidity overcame his evident curiosity, however, and he spoke never a word until she deposited him in front of his house. There a young, blonde wife appeared at the door and the man pressed a half dollar upon Pat and hastily withdrew.

Later, a hungry business man jumped into the car with scarcely a glance at the driver, and Patty drove him home, received her fee, and turned back once more to the station.

It was growing late. This must be her last trip, Patricia thought, glancing at her watch. When the train pulled in, she noticed that the passengers were no longer attired like the lilies of the field. They were a harder working class of men and women, and they had no money to spend on cab hire. Besides, Pat realized, they must all live in the small, closely set houses at the top of the first hill and could easily

walk. She was making up her mind that it would not be necessary, in the future, to meet this train when, to her joy, she saw Doctor Stafford coming along the platform.

She hailed him gleefully and, sitting beside her as they rolled swiftly up the hill, she recounted to him the thrilling tale of her afternoon's adventures. He was as pleased as she at her success and noted with a warm feeling about his heart how bright her eyes were and how richly the colour had flooded back into her cheeks.

The old question had been asked as soon as they had greeted each other and the reply was the same, each to each, as before. "No news." It had saddened them both for a moment, but the man who had so inexplicably disappeared had played but a small part in Stuart Stafford's busy life. In that of Patricia, the part had been important but it had not been of long duration. She liked her uncle Morgan very much, was learning to love the queer little man, and she missed him. However, youth is youth and her spirits would not stay for ever in the gloom of anxiety and depression.

"Doctor S. O. S. is right," she said to herself as she fell asleep that night. "There's nothing like a job—a steady job."

CHAPTER XII

PROMPTLY at twenty minutes after eight the next morning, Patricia stopped her car in front of Mr. William Turnbull's pretentious mansion, waited a moment, and then, following the precedent of experience, "honked" her horn.

Almost immediately the door flew open and Mr. Turnbull and his daughter appeared and came quickly down the walk.

"If you're always as prompt as this," he said, grinning good-naturedly, "I won't miss any more trains, thank Heaven! Get in, Hilda. Say, listen" —he turned back to Patricia—"I hate like thunder to ride in a car somebody else is driving. Come on. Be a sport. Let me take the wheel."

Patty hesitated.

"You needn't be afraid I'll do any damage," Turnbull continued. "I can drive anything that's got an engine under its bonnet. Move over and you can sit alongside and coach all you please so long as you don't grab the wheel. Come ahead. There's a good girl!"

Pat didn't much like surrendering her post, but the man was quite evidently bent on having his own way and she was heartily desirous of retaining this steady

customer. She was very much afraid, if she stood out for her right to drive her own car, that it would end a profitable connection, so, reluctantly, she slid over on the broad seat and relinquished her place to him.

Turnbull glanced over the gear shift, the clutch, brake, and accelerator, asked a question or two, and took the wheel in practised hands. He drove well and carefully and Patricia was satisfied. He expressed himself as being so pleased with the performance of the little car that she had a momentary fear that he might buy one instead of waiting for his own to be repaired, but when he stepped out at the station he only said, "Four-ten train to-night, remember," and proceeded on his way.

After that he took the wheel every night and morning as a matter of course, and Pat was content, for the fact that she would allow him to drive seemed to cement and make permanent a most satisfactory arrangement.

It was with a comparatively light heart that Patricia returned to her uncle's house that morning. In spite of untoward circumstances, everything was working out pretty well.

She and her mother had never spent much time together. The little lady, it must be confessed, was very indolent and, since there were no social duties to be performed, she was content to spend a great deal of time in bed and, for the rest, she had her work to do. Sewing for her darling daughter was, she told

Doctor Stafford, her chief interest in life, though the doctor shrewdly guessed, from the long period of time in which a given garment of filmy texture and strange and unaccountable shape was in evidence, that Mrs. Carrington was hardly overtaxing her strength.

They fell, then, into a regular routine. As far as Mrs. Carrington knew, Patricia and the doctor went for a drive every morning, both worked for part of the day in the gardens, and Patricia went driving in that horrid motor car every afternoon.

But life was hardly uneventful for Patricia. She had her first really exciting adventure about a week after she had started in her new profession. And this is how it befell.

With an amateur's enthusiasm, she had decided to try meeting some of the earlier afternoon trains, reasoning that if the social and financial conditions of commuters waned as the day wore on, the earlier she went, the better.

She was, therefore, at her post when the two-fifty-eight up train slid into the station. There was no other cab in waiting and what harvest there was, she congratulated herself, would be hers to reap.

The passengers descended slowly. Two or three workmen, who paused to light their pipes and then made off in the other direction; an old woman with a market basket; a couple of gum-chewing schoolgirls in flimsy, gay garments, and that apparently was all.

Pat was beginning to be very much disappointed

when, above the noise of the starting train, she heard a quick step on the platform and a man, who must have been riding in the forward coach, appeared around the corner of the station. She glanced at him swiftly with an eye to business.

What she saw was a young man in a good but somewhat worn uniform, with two silver bars on the shoulders and a ribbon of many stripes upon his breast. He was of medium height and well set up, with bronzed face and quick, rather attractive brown eyes. His nose was short and direct, though of no accepted form of architecture. His jaw and chin were strongly modelled. His mouth, above which perched a small, closely trimmed moustache, was rather large, but clean cut and somewhat whimsical in expression.

What the young man saw, as he ascended the three steps from the platform, caused him to open his eyes wide with surprise. He had seen girls in uniform in the camp before he left. He had seen them again at the ship when he returned, but they had been driving ambulances or khaki-coloured cars on which some altruistic symbol had been conspicuously displayed. This girl was hardly in uniform. Her khaki skirt and coat, even her tan boots, had a somewhat military cut, but her hat was of soft tan felt with a plain black band and the car, by the open door of which she stood, was plainly a gentleman's car. The neat sign which indicated that it was a public conveyance appeared startlingly incongruous.

But what struck him as being most incongruous of all was the girl herself. Her slim young figure was so gracefully poised on her slender, well-shod feet; the cut of her clothes and the way she wore them spoke aloud of refinement and breeding; and her face—he could not see all of it, owing to the large motor glasses, but what he could see was enough, in the circumstances, to intrigue any man with eyes in his head and a young and adventurous heart in his breast: a firm, well-rounded, purposeful chin above the straight, military collar; curving lips of a delectable rose, a nice little nose, not exactly turned up but with a pleasing tendency in a heavenward direction, and, through the disfiguring goggles, straight-looking dark eyes.

Meeting their glance, the young soldier became suddenly aware that he was staring. Somewhat embarrassed, he glanced quickly about, saw that there were no other cabs in the broad parking space, and, after a moment's hesitation, stepped forward.

"I beg your pardon," he said, with a quick military salute. "I—it—am I mistaken in taking that sign seriously?" He pointed to the placard on the glass.

Patricia could not help smiling, just the least little hint of a smile, but it showed her dimples most engagingly. The young man's bewilderment was very amusing.

"It's—it's a taxicab," said Patricia, gravely, "if that's what you mean. Don't you believe in signs?"

"Well, yes. Sometimes, but not always." The young man's laugh was certainly very pleasing. "I'd be very glad to believe in this one, though, if I may."

"Certainly," said Patricia, with a little lift of the chin. "I'll drive you wherever you wish to go. The price is fifty cents anywhere within the village limits." She said this with a little air of defiance. She wished the soldier to understand, at once, that their conversation was, with her, purely a matter of business.

He met her look squarely. "Thank you," he said, removing the smile from his face with an effort. "The price is perfectly satisfactory. Will you take me, please, to number eight hundred and ninety-three Broad Road?"

Patricia started and gave him a quick look.

"It's Mr. Morgan Carrington's house," the soldier added. "You know where it is?"

"Yes," said Patricia, slowly. "Yes. I know where it is, but——" She hesitated. Her brain was in a whirl. Could this be——

The young man's glance was questioning.

"But what?" he asked.

"If—if you were going to see Mr. Carrington," said Pat, "I would be able to save you the trip. I happen to know that Mr. Carrington is not at home."

"Oh, he isn't? Now, that's too bad!" he exclaimed, feelingly, and added, "I've come a very long way to see Mr. Carrington."

"It's very unfortunate," said Patricia, while her thoughts raced.

So he had come a long way, this attractive young soldier, and to see her uncle Morgan. Could it—could it be her cousin Ned? But he was still supposed to be on the Rhine. At least, that was what Uncle Morgan had told her. Could there be a mistake? Had he returned so much earlier than he was expected? Such things did happen. And if so, what should she tell him? It would be absurd to tell a perfect stranger just how very, very unfortunate it was that Mr. Carrington was not at home. That was a thing to be kept strictly among his immediate family and friends. It was too important to run any risks. Besides, her presence there and the fact that she was running a taxi would require a great deal of explanation. If he would only tell her who he was. . . . But all he said was:

"It's very disappointing to me, Mr. Carrington's being away. I hardly know what to do." His eyes were fixed meditatively on her face.

Just at that moment, the burly form of a blue-coated policeman hove in sight around the corner of the station. His uniform was new and his metal badge very bright and shining. A short club swung from his great, red hand. He made directly for Patricia.

"Look here, Miss," he said, in a loud, aggressive voice, "you're running a taxicab, you are, and I got to see yer license. I seen you last night but I wasn't

sure what you was up to. If you do a public hackin' business, you got to have a chauffeur's license, see!"

"I have a chauffeur's license," said Patricia, quickly. "Here it is," and reaching into an inner pocket of her coat, she drew out a somewhat soiled pink card and held it out to him.

"What's this?" asked the policeman, sharply. "This ain't no New York license. Them cards are white. What you tryin' to put over on me? This is a North Carolina license. That's no good here, 'n' you ought to know it. You get in now an' drive over to the police station with me an' be quick about it, see!"

Patricia's face went first red and then white.

"Look here, officer. Just come over here a minute." It was the soldier who spoke and he was obviously in the habit of giving commands and of having those commands obeyed.

The policeman saluted surlily and stepped aside. Pat could not hear what was said by either of the men. After a short colloquy, the soldier touched the blue sleeve and both men disappeared around the corner of the station. They returned almost immediately and, to Patty's surprise, the disagreeable policeman was smiling broadly.

"All right, Colonel," he said, as the soldier advanced toward the car. "I didn't know she was a friend of yours. Sorry I butted in."

The young man smiled at Patricia reassuringly.

"It's all right. Now, are you ready?"

The girl looked puzzled.

"Get in," said the soldier, in a low voice, "and drive up the hill. I'll explain as we go. So long, officer."

The policeman saluted again, this time imitating as nearly as possible the soldier's quick, snappy gesture.

Patricia started her engine. The young man leaped into the seat beside her and, leaning forward, pulled the "To hire" sign from the windshield and slipped it into the pocket of the door at his side. In silence Patricia threw in the clutch and the car sped swiftly up the long hill. When they had topped the first rise and were out of sight of the station, she slowed down.

"What happened?" she asked, excitedly.

"Why, nothing much." The young soldier leaned back and folded his arms. "I just gave him a little song and dance about your—your being a friend of mine, come to meet me, and I just home from France, you know. Shame to break up happy meeting, and all that sort of thing. He took it all right." The young man failed to state that what the policeman took most readily was an oblong of paper, tastefully embellished with a portrait of Washington on one side, and on the other, elaborately engraved and printed in green. "So everything is for the best, you see," he went on, laughing, "in the best of all possible worlds. If I hadn't happened to be there he might have put you in a somewhat disagreeable position; so I was in luck. Seriously, though, if you

really are serious in this taxi business——" He looked at her rather incredulously.

"I am," said Pat, and closed her lips firmly.

"Well, in that case, you will be obliged to get a New York chauffeur's license. It's easy enough to get"—and he outlined to her the correct mode of procedure.

Patricia listened carefully to the details.

"I'll do it to-morrow," she said. "It's really very good of you and I do appreciate your helping me out. Now, where can I take you?"

"Hum-m. Let me see. It wouldn't do to go directly back to the station, would it? That policeman would be pretty sure to be there still, and I'm afraid I drew the long-lost wanderer stuff rather strong. Suppose you could drive me about a bit and then land me at a station farther up the line?"

"I have nearly an hour," said Patricia, somewhat doubtful of the propriety of driving this strange young man (for, even though he might turn out to be Ned Driscoll, still he was a strange young man to her) about. She was concerned, too, with the necessity of meeting Mr. Turnbull and his daughter. "I have to meet someone on the four-ten up train, no matter what happens. It's very important."

"Business?" the young man hazarded.

"Yes," said Patricia.

"Well, I don't think you'll have any more trouble with the policeman, at least not to-day. So don't let that worry you. Only I wouldn't put up that dressy little sign again, if I were you, till I got my license."

"I won't," the girl promised, readily. "I'll only meet the four-ten train, and I won't need the sign for that. I really am very grateful to you for helping me out. There's—there's a reason why it would have meant a lot of trouble for me if—— But I'll get the license to-morrow and then I'll be all right. Now I'll take you to Dorrs Ferry; that's the next station up the line. You'll be in time for the three-forty-eight, I think it is, from there; the next train into town, I mean. I'm so sorry to have been obliged to take you out of your way. However, you won't really lose any time, and the drive over to Dorrs Ferry is very lovely."

"I'm sure it is," said the soldier, glancing sidewise at the delicate curve of her dimpled cheek and wishing that she would see fit to remove the glasses which hid so much of her face. "Please don't apologize. This is much better than a long wait at the station. The pleasure is really quite all mine."

The car had been running very slowly. Without replying, save by a little friendly smile, Patricia pressed her foot on the accelerator and the car started forward at a better pace. They had gone but a little farther when the young man turned to her with an engaging smile and said, somewhat abruptly:

"You know I'm simply burning up with curiosity. It's none of my business and I haven't the least right in the world to ask, but I do wish you'd tell me why you"—with a little stress on the pronoun—"are running a taxi."

Pat stiffened a little.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but—but I'm afraid I must point out that the first part of your remark was quite obviously—— Well, you said it yourself, and it's true, you know."

"That it's none of my business." He nodded sadly. "Yes, I know it. But it really is true, too, that I'm just back from the other side and I haven't seen a girl to talk to in a month of Sundays, and I'm naturally the most curious man in the world, and I feel as if I would probably die in the night if I couldn't find out why——"

The car stopped dead still and began slowly to slide back. Pat slammed on the brakes.

"Anything wrong?" asked the young man, with a glance at her face.

"Why—why, yes," she said. "It just died—the engine, I mean. I can't imagine—— No. No, thanks. I don't need any help. I think I can find out what the trouble is."

She let the car slide back out of the road, jumped out, and lifted the hood. The soldier followed slowly, watching with amused admiration the girl's consciously expert testing of the spark plugs. She looked the engine all over, then went back to her seat and tried to start it. Nothing happened.

"I can't see anything wrong," she said, stepping to the road again. "Perhaps you can."

The last words carried a faint tinge of annoyance.

It seemed to Pat that he was looking at her with more than a trace of masculine superiority.

"I hate to suggest it," said the soldier, diffidently, "but it sometimes happens in the best regulated families. You're quite, quite sure that you have enough gas?"

Then Pat remembered and blushed up to the roots of her soft dark hair. She had been driving the car more than usual lately and, for the first time, in the excitement of her new venture, she had quite forgotten to replenish the tank. Of course that was it! What would he think of her? Pretending to the high position of a professional chauffeur and forgetting anything so obvious! If she had not been thinking so hard of something else, she would have known by the sound what the trouble was.

The young man had, perhaps, known it all along. His irrepressible laughter, quickly restrained, only added to Pat's discomfiture. She could have cried with vexation.

"Well, there's only one thing to do when you run out of gas," he said, cheerfully, "and that's to get some more. There must be a house up there behind those trees. Here's the entrance. We could 'phone the nearest garage and——"

"It won't be necessary," said Patricia, quickly. "I can—I know the people in the next house beyond. I can get gas there. W—they have plenty."

She said this confidently for they had been on the

point of passing her uncle's house when the car stopped and she, of course, knew that there was a large supply of gasoline in the tank at the garage.

"I'll come with you, if I may," said the young man, promptly. "It will be heavy and there might not be any one about to help you carry it."

Patricia accepted his offer gladly. If it were her cousin, she thought quickly, he would not know the house, since her uncle had told her that Ned Driscoll had never happened to see the old place. If it were not—it could hardly matter, one way or the other, and he probably would never know. Anyway, she must have help, for Sam had gone into town for his day off and it would be very difficult for her to bring down enough gas to run the car over to Dorrs Ferry and back to the four-twenty train without stopping for more, and her heart was set on keeping her appointment. It was growing late and she must not keep Mr. Turnbull waiting. She had enough judgment of character to feel that this would be fatal to her "regular job."

The young soldier shortened his long stride to keep pace with her hurried footsteps and, in smiling silence, climbed the driveway at her side. He noticed that the girl seemed very familiar with the appliances of the garage. Also that she did not think it necessary to go to the house to prefer a request for the required gasoline.

"She must know these people very well," he thought, glancing aside at the large, comfortable

house as he helped her fill a big metal can from the pump in the garage.

They had just lifted the can between them and started out of the door when a voice from the house hailed them.

"Aw-w-w, Miss Patty!" A smiling darky face appeared in the window. "Yo' maw been askin' after you. You better run in en see her. She was powerful 'noyed 'caze you wasn't yere when she done woke up. Come in de house, chile, quick. She say she mighty po'ly."

With a quick word of apology, Patricia dropped the handle of the can and ran. Was her mother really ill? Or was it only—— She must find out, she thought, and dashed into the house.

Left alone, the soldier set the heavy can down on the drive and strolled slowly forward. His brow was furrowed with thought. He did not wish to pry, but he was most intensely interested. The girl's name was Patty—so much was plain; and this house —— He looked at it intently as he drew nearer. A good house, a very good house, indeed. Old, but large and roomy. This must be the kitchen entrance. He came to an abrupt standstill. Something was staring him in the face, which Pat had quite forgotten.

In white figures against a blue background, tacked firmly to a riser of one of the porch steps, was the house number—893.

Eight ninety-three, and he had seen, when they had

turned into the street below, that it was Broad Road. He could not be mistaken. This was the house he had intended to come to—Morgan Carrington's house—and the girl driving a public taxi must be——

He checked a low whistle as the girl herself suddenly appeared.

"It's all right," she said, breathlessly, coming swiftly toward him. "Now I'll have to hurry—awfully"—and she caught up the gasoline can.

"Don't try to lift it alone. It's too heavy," warned the young man, assuming his share of the burden.

He did not question her any more as the car sped northward, and for this he valued himself highly. Only when he stepped off at Dorrs Ferry station did he hazard one question which he felt it right and necessary to ask.

"You don't happen to know when Mr. Carrington will return to Stonehill, do you?"

"I—I really couldn't say," answered Patricia. "I'm sorry, but I don't know his plans. I only happen to be sure that he isn't there to-day."

"And you have no way of knowing when he'll be back, I suppose?"

"No," said Patricia, "I have no means of knowing."

She said this very definitely. The young man regarded her with a grave glance which she met squarely.

The long shriek of the incoming train sounded from up the river.

"Well, thank you," said the soldier. "I'll have to

take my chance of finding him. Thank you for a very interesting drive—and—au revoir."

He lifted his hand to his cap and dropped it smartly. His face was smiling but, behind the smile, was a curiously troubled young brain.

"I thank you, too, oh, so much!" said Patricia. "Au re—— Oh, I mean, good-bye."

"Au revoir," repeated the young man, firmly—and had to make a dash for the train.

CHAPTER XIII

"AND you're quite sure, Pat, that this is the same man?" asked Doctor Stafford.

"Quite, quite sure, Doctor S. O. S."

They were standing side by side, before the long table in the doctor's living room. Upon it, under the shaded light, lay a large photograph. It represented a group of men, boys rather, dressed in somewhat scanty apparel and holding long sculls in their hands. On the breast of each a large H was conspicuously displayed. Patricia's slender finger indicated one of the group.

"Allowing for the difference in clothes, which is quite considerable, and for the fact that he's wearing a funny little moustache now, it's the same man," she continued. "He's older, of course, and I didn't see him without his cap, but I'm perfectly sure it's the same."

"Well," said the doctor, considering the story of her afternoon adventure which Pat had but now excitedly narrated, "it certainly would seem probable that the man was Ned Driscoll, but don't you think it was odd that he didn't tell you who he was? Not at first, I mean. But even though, as you say, Ned has never seen the house, there's the number on the

back steps as well as on the front, and if he's at all observant, he must have known that it was the house he was looking for. He heard Lily call your name and could hardly fail to guess who you must be. Your uncle would surely have written him all about you and your mother being with him here at the old house, else how would he have known the address?"

"Yes," said Pat. "I've been puzzling about that. I can't see, exactly, why he wouldn't have owned up if he knew who I was. I didn't think about the number on the back steps. You are clever, Doctor S. O. S. You think of everything, I believe. It seems as if he must have known. But he must have been rather staggered by Uncle Morgan's not being here—and my running a taxi—that must have given him a lot to think about. I wonder what he thought."

The doctor, looking at her flushed face, in which amusement and a pleasurable excitement were charmingly blended, imagined that he could guess some of the young soldier's fancies. He glanced again at the boyish face in the picture. It was a good face, he decided, a merry, happy-go-lucky sort of face. Untried, it was true, but it seemed to indicate that its owner might be expected to go far in any undertaking which should present itself as desirable.

"Well, there's one thing we can be pretty sure of," he said, after a moment. "If it is your cousin, he'll be turning up again very soon. By the way, where did you find this picture?"

"I found it just by accident," Pat rejoined. "I was straightening up Uncle Morgan's study while I was waiting for Mother to decide to go to bed and give me a chance to slip over here. It was very untidy—the study, I mean. I opened a table drawer to put some things inside, and there, staring me in the face, was this photograph. I'd never seen it before. I took it over to the light—and there he was." She pointed again at the figure which was interesting her so deeply.

"There's just a chance, you know," said Doctor Stafford, meditatively, "that this isn't Ned, at all. He might be any one of the others and your soldier friend could have been a classmate who met Ned again on the other side and promised to look up Ned's uncle and give him news of the boy as soon as he reached home."

Pat considered this possibility for a moment, with pursed lips and a little, intent frown. It was quite evident, to the doctor, that she greatly preferred the more romantic explanation.

"Of course, it might be that," she said, doubtfully, "but it seems hardly probable. He—he was quite interested—in me, I think"—with a quizzical smile and a little flush.

"That's not conclusive at all," said the doctor, laughing. "I'm interested in you myself, and I'm not your cousin."

"Oh, well, you know, Doctor S. O. S., that's dif-

ferent. You're my friend," and she stretched out her little hand to him.

The old man took it and, leaning forward, with a gesture instinct with the graciousness of an earlier day, kissed it gently. Then he straightened, squared his shoulders, and looked into her face.

"Until death, little comrade," he said, gravely. "I only wish I could do more to help you."

"But no one could do more than you are doing, dear Doctor S. O. S.," she cried. "I bring all my perplexities, big and little, to you and you're—oh, you're such a brick about everything! I'd be lost, entirely, without you. But with you, in spite of the terrible uncertainty about poor Uncle Morgan, I'm almost happy. Driving the taxi is such fun. It's so exciting and interesting and I'm making quite a lot of money. I counted it a little while ago and I have made twenty-four dollars and fifty cents already, and that's not counting my two steady customers, you and Mr. Turnbull. And I had to stop early to-day on account of not having the right kind of a license. Oh, I think it's going to be fine! Isn't it funny the way you feel about money you earn all yourself? I never felt the same about money before. It seems—oh, so different! So really mine, you know."

"Oh, you're going to do a rattling good business when you get really started," said the doctor, smiling at her enthusiasm. "And we're going to make a lot on our preserves and pickles and things. I put up

some strawberries this afternoon while you were out taxicabbing. Want to taste 'em?"

"Oh, yes, indeedy. May I?"

"You certainly may," said the doctor and, disappearing, presently returned with a sauce dish of rich, transparent, luscious strawberry preserves which he set before her with pride.

"Um-um! Never tasted anything so wonderful," murmured Patricia with her mouth full. "How in the world can you do it, Doctor S. O. S.?"

"It's a famous old receipt of my mother's," answered the doctor, beaming. "Most delectable, isn't it? I've always loved messing around a stove. Not many men like it, but it's lots of fun. I can cook almost anything. Wish I had more time, though. A little later it's going to be hard to keep up with the garden. Do you suppose we could get your Lily to help? There'll be work enough for three."

Patty looked doubtful.

"I don't know, Doctor S. O. S. Lily's very good and willing but something's come over her lately. She's as grumpy as anything, and this morning she told me she was going to leave."

"Oh, Lord!" ejaculated the doctor. "That would be a mess."

"Wouldn't it! It would be too awful to think about. I wouldn't know how to go about getting new servants, and Sam would leave, too, of course. I can't make sure whether or not they suspect anything about Uncle Morgan. I don't believe so. Lily

insists that the house is 'done hanted'—says there's a black cat runs around the house at night with a step like a man's. Of course, we know someone's been around the house and that she must have heard the footsteps. That's bad enough. Lily really believes it's a spirit, and Sam's awfully downhearted, too. I spent nearly an hour persuading them to stay. I cried some, at the last. I felt like crying and I did. It touched Lily right away. She's very tenderhearted—and at last they promised to stay till Uncle Morgan gets back anyway. Oh, dear, I wish we could know——"

"Now, now, dear child, don't think about that. Just live every day as it comes along and be as nearly happy as you can. Of course, we can't altogether keep Morgan out of our minds, but we're getting along well, in spite of everything, and we mustn't worry any more than we can help. Your income from the car will be coming in most satisfactorily before long, and soon we'll be selling preserves and delicious home-canned vegetables. The gardens are both wonderful, thanks to our good friend Marco. He certainly was a find, that man. I'm glad you decided to let him help in your garden, too. It's too big for one pair of hands, and Marco's worth the money. I never saw an Italian work harder. He comes early and stays late. The man's a perfect jewel."

They talked on a little longer and then, though it was still early, the doctor thought Pat looked tired

and insisted on taking her home. It was a cloudy, windy night, threatening rain.

"The wind's in the east. It'll probably rain all day to-morrow," said the doctor as they left the house. "Do the crops lots of good and be a holiday for Marco, poor chap. He certainly deserves it. He's by long odds the best man I've ever had."

In the meantime, the best man the good doctor ever had was not sleeping the sleep of the just—and weary. He was, in fact, much nearer at hand than the doctor could have imagined.

Marco had gone early to his room over the little fruit shop of his friend, Annaballe Firenzi. Had listened to the subsiding sounds in the rest of the tiny, crowded flat and, when nothing remained but the deep drone of heavy sleepers, he had pulled off his shoes and slipped noiselessly out into the narrow hall. The door to the covered outside staircase of the old two-story building was close on his right. He unbolted and opened it softly and as quietly closed it again. With stealthy step, he descended the stair and, pausing only to put on his shoes, hurried out into the street. He walked swiftly northward along the aqueduct, noted, as he neared it, the light in Doctor Stafford's house, and, at the sound of voices issuing from the open door, he had silently dropped down the steep side of the embankment and lay very still in the long grass under the hedge.

The doctor and Patricia passed close by him on

their way to the big house. So close, indeed, that he heard his name mentioned and smiled craftily to himself in the darkness.

When they were quite gone, he sprang up from his hiding place and ran. His feet made no sound on the soft turf beside the path, and in a moment he had gained the shelter of the trees to the north and slowed down to a rapid walk. When he reached the village of Dorrs Ferry, he went down the hill by unfrequented back streets, crossed the railroad tracks just below the station lights, and made his way out on to a small pier which stepped gingerly forth into the great river.

He stood for a moment at the end of the pier, apparently listening intently. The faint throb of a small engine could be heard coming nearer and nearer across the still, black water. With a satisfied nod of the head, Marco walked quietly back to the shore and let himself down to the sand in the dark shadow of the pier.

Presently he heard a boat slide up alongside the float at the end of the dock, and a gruff voice said:

"Not later than twelve, remember. I promised the missus. This ain't no all-night service, 'n' if your show keeps up later'n that I'll leave ye to swim back t' yer job. Now you mind what I say. I'm goin' t' the movies, myself, 'n' they're over by eleven. I won't wait more'n an hour."

"Oh, I'll be back before twelve. May be back before you are, Captain Brown."

At the sound of this voice Marco nodded as if he recognized it and was well content. He peeped from his hiding place and saw, dimly outlined against the background of the station lights, the figures of two men crossing in that direction. Before they had come within the radius of the lights, however, they suddenly stopped. One of the men said something to the other and pointed back in the direction of the boat they had just left. After a short colloquy, one man went on toward the station while the other turned and came quickly back.

"All righta, boss," said Marco in a deep, husky whisper, raising his head above the string-piece. "Come down here. Plenta comfortable an' quiet down here on sand. So—this way."

He guided the dark figure down to his place of hiding and the two sat close together on the sand. They talked in guarded tones and at considerable length. Their voices never rose above a whisper except once. Then Marco said aloud, in a tone of sharp remonstrance:

"Don't do it, boss! Don't do it! What's de use huntin' de troub'? Evera t'ing goin' fine jus' like you hope. Don' spoil evera t'ing! You just gotta wait. No use spilla de bean for nottin'. I tella you, Marco watch. Marco watch 'em all. An' when de time come like you say at firs'——"

The other man gripped his arm and Marco's voice died again to a low murmur of unavailing entreaty.

CHAPTER XIV

THOUGH Patricia, regardful of a promise she had made to Doctor S. O. S., went immediately to bed, she found it difficult to sleep. The faint night noises in the house seemed louder and more insistent than ever before. The east wind outside rushed and swirled through the myriad leaves of the trees, rising stronger and stronger, now lulling a little, then returning with increasing gusty vigour. Then came the rain, not heavily, but with quick, angry spatters.

Pat's windows faced the east and she was forced to jump out of bed to close them. She stood for a moment, looking out into the wind-swept blackness. Then she went over to the bed and threw back the blanket. The room seemed stifling with all the driving air shut out, but there was no help for it. She would not risk the ruin of the pretty chintz curtains Uncle Morgan had allowed her to get. . . . Uncle Morgan . . . where was he now? What had happened to him?—She must not think of that. She'd promised Doctor S. O. S. she wouldn't. . . . Something else. . . . She must think of something else. . . . The young soldier. . . . Yes. That was something else to think about. A captain, he was. . . . Ned Driscoll was a lieuten-

ant when last Uncle Morgan had heard. . . . Had he been promoted, perhaps? Or was this only a friend of his, as Doctor S. O. S. had suggested? . . . He seemed—well—awfully nice. . . . If it should be Ned Driscoll . . .

At last Patricia slept. But not for long. She did not even realize that she had lost consciousness, when she was broad awake, sitting bolt upright in bed, listening for the terrible sound which seemed even now to be ringing in her ears. There it was again. A frightful wailing shriek.

Without an instant's hesitation Pat leapt from her bed, wrapped herself in a dressing gown which lay across its foot, caught up her father's old automatic from the bed-head table, and rushed to the door. When she opened it, the hall was filled with a black darkness which seemed all the more dreadful for the repeated screams which rent the silence. Pat's first thought was of her mother, though the frightful sound came from the floor above. Then everything happened with the rapidity of thought. She started noiselessly across the hall—and stopped, her heart beating violently. In the breath-taking lull between the screams she was sure that she heard a footstep in the hall below.

She crouched back against the wall and faced the stairhead, her pistol held ready. Then the scream came again, and before it had quite died away, she heard the back door in the lower hall close softly. She could not be mistaken. The sound of the latch,

as the bolt shot home, was distinct in the instant's silence.

Patricia slipped along the wall to her mother's door.

"Mother," she whispered, tapping it lightly. "Mother, are you there? Don't come out."

"No, no, darling. I won't." The trembling voice came through the keyhole. "What is it, Patricia? Who's making that dreadful sound?"

"It must be Lily, I think. I'm going up to see. Don't come out for anything. Keep your door locked. You'll be quite safe. Don't come out, whatever you hear, till I come back."

Without waiting for an assurance which she knew would readily be given, the girl ran back across the hall and up the stairs. As she neared the top, she heard a slight sound on the landing above and something swift and soft brushed her bare feet. She could not stop to see what it was, for the nerve-racking screams from the upper floor still continued with unabated violence, and she dashed wildly on.

"What is it? Sam! Lily! What is it?" she cried in an intense whisper as she reached their open door.

"Aw, Miss Patty, Miss Patty, chile! What d' ah tell yer? Dis house am hanted, hit am hanted fer sho!" And again Lily let forth a blood-curdling shriek.

The room was brightly lighted and Pat was relieved to see the woman, apparently quite unhurt, sitting

up in the bed, her knees drawn up and clasped in her arms, rocking herself violently to and fro.

"Hush that noise at once, Lily," she said, firmly, though her own knees were shaking. "What's the matter? Tell me. Are you hurt? What is it, Sam?"

Sam, sitting on the edge of the bed, endeavouring to quiet the hysterical woman, was a grotesque sketch in black and white. Severely conscious of the scantiness of his night attire, he tried to slide his long, black legs under the bed and, at the same time, to assume the respectful attitude of his race and calling.

"'Scuse me, Miss Patty. 'Scuse us, won't yer please, ma'am. Was somepin' turrible happen des now. Scairt Lily mos' to deaf, en no wonder, po' chile. Be quiet, Lily, gal. Warn't nuffin' but a cat, a sho nuff cat, ah tells yer." He tried to say it with conviction, but his great black eyes were rolling.

"Cat! G'long, Sam. What yer talkin' erbout, boy? Was a hant, Miss Patty. 'Deed an' 'deed hit were. Hit jump right on mah bres'. Yas'm! Hit sho did. Oh-e-e-e-e!"

"Hush, Lily. Oh, hush! It was a real cat. It passed me on the stairs. We'll go down and find it and put it out. You mustn't make that horrible noise. You frightened us all dreadfully. Come, now, quiet down. That's a good girl." Patricia patted her on the shoulder and soothed her for a few minutes. The woman responded slowly to the calming touch. As the quickest means of distracting her

attention from her fears, Patty said, admiringly, "My, what a lovely nightgown you have on, Lily. I haven't anything half so wonderful. You make me right jealous."

"Yas'm," said Lily, sadly, touching the folds of pink silk embellished with coarse lace, "hit's awful sweet. Sam give hit to me fer a 'gagement present but ah won't live t' wear hit out. You'll see. Dat was a wa'nin' en hit's come twicet. Trouble—trouble comin' t' yo' en me, Sambo. Yas, suh. Yo' mark my words!"

"Don't, Lily! Don't, gal!" cried Sam, passing his great black hand over his shiny face. "Nebba trouble trouble twell trouble troubles you."

The woman had quieted down, now, and only moaned lugubriously.

"Cheer up, Lily," said Patricia, kindly. "Nothing's going to hurt you. Sam and I will see to it, won't we, Sam?"

"Yas'm," Sam responded, doubtfully. "Yas'm. But ah think Lily en ah better be passin' along."

"Oh, no, Sam. No," said Patricia, quickly. "I can't get on without you and Lily. You know I can't. You promised you'd stay till Mr. Carrington comes home."

"Dat's so. We done promus, Sam," said Lily, faintly. "Ah ain't nebber broke a promus yit. Ah was raise' right, ah tell yo', boy. When I gives my wud, ah keeps hit. An't don't mek no diffunce, Sam, anyhow. Ah done mark fer trouble an hit'll

foller wherebber we goes. We mought as well stay where we are."

"You're a good girl, Lily. You surely are," said Patricia, gratefully. "And I'll see that nothing happens to you. Everything will be all right for you, at least, and I won't forget how you've kept your word. Now, slip on some clothes, Sam, and come down through the house with me. If the cat's still there, we'll let it out. I have my father's pistol. There isn't any danger, really, you know."

She tried to believe what she said. There had been someone in the house, she was sure. She felt equally certain that whoever it was had made good his escape, but her heart beat violently, painfully, as she stood on the landing waiting for Sam and looking down the dark stair, her pistol ready in her hand.

He joined her in a moment and they went down together. She paused before her mother's door and whispered:

"Mother, can you hear me? It's all right. Lily was frightened by a cat. Sam and I are going down to let it out. It's quite all right."

Then, hastily, she crossed the hall to her uncle's door, beside which was the light switch. She pressed the button and the light flashed up and flooded both the upper and lower halls and the stairs. Everything was quiet. Nothing stirred inside the house and only the rain could be heard, dashing fitfully in little spiteful gusts against the back windows.

"Come on, Sam," said Patricia and, taking her courage in both hands, rapidly descended the stairs while Sam followed in silence, like a black shadow.

He glanced uneasily about the floor, but Patty had almost forgotten the cat, which was nowhere to be seen. She switched on the light in each room before she entered it and examined it carefully.

Nothing seemed amiss in the dining room. The drawer of the sideboard, which contained a large outfit of heavy old silver, was untouched. There was no one in the kitchen and no signs of any one having been there, though the door into the small hall at the back of the house was ajar, which was unusual.

"Did you or Lily leave this door open, Sam?" asked Patty, sharply.

"Ah disremember, Miss Patty. Ah ain't sho. We allus keeps hit shut so de smell ob de cookin' won't come into de house, like you tells us, but hit mought of blew open. Hit sometimes do."

"The cellar door's open, too. We'd better take a look down there." And, remembering the cat, she added, "This is the way your spirit got into the house, I'm sure."

"No use mentionin' 'em, Miss Patty," said Sam, fearfully. "No use namin' deir names. Ah ain't askeared, only—hit's jes' ez well to tek no chances yo' kin he'p."

Patricia did not believe in taking unnecessary risks, either. She switched on the light at the head of the stairs and peered about before she went down.

"There's where the cat got out, Sam," she said, after a quick survey. "See that broken pane at the top of the coal heap. He probably came and went that way. I must have it mended and then you'll see there'll be no more black cats in the house."

Sam would be very glad to believe that, he told her, as they quickly made their way back to the main floor.

The living room looked just as usual to Patricia. There was not the slightest indication of anything having been disturbed. She passed through it with Sam at her heels and entered her uncle's study. There was no switch by the door of this room. What light there was came from the one in front and fell in a luminous rectangle on the floor. At the end of this illumined space lay several folded slips of paper.

Suppressing a cry, Pat started forward and pulled the chain of the lamp on the desk. Instantly a green light shone on her face, turning it ghastly. Below the shade, the big, shining desk lay revealed in a white glare. On it, carelessly tumbled about, was a small heap of papers. All the drawers had been opened and ransacked. So had those of a highboy which stood in one corner. Even the small drawer of the table by the south window had been rifled and now stood open, the contents partly spilled upon the floor.

Sam's face was a study.

"Who been messin' up we-all's house?" he mut-

tered. "Mistah Carrin'ton gwine be mighty mad when he comes home. Yas, suh! Who you reckon been throwin' things 'roun' dis a way, Miss Patty?"

"I don't know. I can't guess, Sam," said Patricia, trembling with cold and excitement.

She searched through the drawers swiftly, in spite of her shaking limbs. She had put them in order just the day before and, so far as she could tell, nothing was missing. They had contained nothing that seemed to her of special value. Certainly nothing to tempt an ordinary thief. No money—no securities of any kind. Who had been there? And with what object? And how had the house been entered?

"You locked all the doors and windows to-night, Sam? You're sure?" she asked.

"Yas'm. Ah'm sholy sho. Ah done lock up de whole house 'cepin' de back do' whilst yo' was ober to de docter's."

Pat's heart gave a little sickening slide downward in her breast. She had locked the back door when she came in. She was sure. Had there been someone in the house even then? Someone lurking in the shadows and watching as she went up the stairs?

Well, the danger was over, at least for the night. All the doors and windows were safely locked. The bolt on the back door was drawn back but the snap-lock was on. Patricia shot the bolt home and she and Sam ascended the stairs quietly.

"Leave all the lights on, Sam," she said, as they

stopped in front of her door. "They're the greatest protection in the world. My father always said so. No one is likely to try to get into a lighted house. I'm going to leave them on full every night till—till Mr. Carrington comes home. Good-night, Sam. We won't have any more trouble. You'll see."

She locked her door, slipped off her dressing gown, and crept into bed, shivering. And for a long time she lay awake seeing, as she had seen it when she closed the door, the wide, silent, empty house, lighted in every room, as if for some joyous festival.

CHAPTER XV

IN HER night's search for traces of an unknown marauder Patricia, with unusual foresight and acumen in one of her years and training, had taken pains to disturb things as little as possible. So that, early the next morning, when she and Doctor Stafford entered the study, it wore practically the same appearance as it had when she turned on the green-shaded light the night before, except that now the gray light of a cloudy day fell wanly across its disorder.

"Plainly, whoever it was, was looking for some definite thing," said the doctor, after a long and careful survey. "He didn't know where to find it, either—that's clear."

Pat had followed the doctor's quick movements with deep interest and anxiety. She had come to place so much dependence on the old man that she expected every moment he would unearth some clue which had escaped her on the previous night. She noted, too, that he was as careful as she had been not to alter the appearance of the room. If he lifted a book or paper, he put it back exactly as it had been, and when he pulled a drawer farther open to examine its contents, he pushed it back to its original position.

He was examining in this way the drawer of the table which stood in the south window when a short ejaculation escaped him.

"What is it, Doctor S. O. S.?"

Patricia was standing close beside him. Now she leaned farther forward to see what had attracted his attention.

"See there, Pat. What do you suppose that means?" he asked, pointing to a few grains of gray and black ash which lay partly on a paper and partly on the bottom of the drawer, close in the corner. "Looks as if the man who was here was a smoker. That he was even so lacking in caution as to be smoking at the time. Rather a strange thing to do, unless he was very sure that he wouldn't be interrupted—that no one in the house was awake to smell the smoke. Queer kind of ash, too. Some of the tobacco is only charred, as if——"

"Oh, I know what that is," cried Pat. "That isn't any clue at all, Doctor S. O. S. I can explain that, myself. I put an old pipe of Uncle Morgan's in there yesterday and the ash must have fallen from it—it couldn't have been quite empty, you see."

"Pipe ash," said the doctor, looking at it again. "Yes, that's just what it is, of course. But the pipe—— Why, Pat, there's no pipe here."

Patricia, too, looked into the drawer as the doctor pulled it farther out. There certainly was no pipe there.

"But I put it in there yesterday, Doctor S. O. S.,

I'm sure. It was here that I found the photograph I showed you, and I found it when I opened the drawer to put the pipe away. The pipe had been lying on the mantelpiece, and every time I saw it, it brought Uncle Morgan right before me. He smoked it so much and I couldn't bear to have it there to remind me."

"Yes, yes," said the doctor, hurriedly. "But it isn't here now, that's clear. You don't suppose that Sam——"

"No. I'm sure Sam doesn't smoke a pipe. At least, I've never seen him."

"And he wouldn't be likely to take your uncle's pipe, anyway. You'd be sure to recognize it if you ever saw it."

"Sam's honest, too," Pat interrupted. "At least, he'd never take anything of ours, I'm certain. And Lily would come down on him like a thousand of brick if he did. She said last night that she was 'raised right' and she's proving it by keeping her word to stay in spite of her terror of 'hants.' No, it couldn't have been Sam."

"Then we have one little, slender clue, Pat. The man is a pipe smoker. I think that's a perfectly safe deduction, though I admit it doesn't lead us very far," said the doctor, ruefully.

The silence which fell between them was broken by the sound of a soft footfall on the stair and, before either of them could move to close the door, Mrs. Carrington, in an elaborate negligee, appeared in the

living room and, catching sight of Patricia, came quickly toward the study.

"Patricia, dear," she said, plaintively, "the coffee Lily sent up to me wasn't fit to drink. It was too awful for words. I had to get up to tell you about it. Will you see that she makes me a fresh cup and that——" She caught sight of Doctor Stafford and at the same moment became conscious of the untidiness of the study.

"Why—why—— Oh, Doctor Stafford!" She drew her lavender silk kimono closer about her. "I didn't know that any one was here. I—— But why is everything upset in here? Morgan will be very angry. Why——" She broke off suddenly and looked keenly from Patricia to the doctor.

"Why don't you say something, Patricia?" she exclaimed, beginning to be alarmed. "What is it? Has something happened? That noise in the night—you said Lily was frightened by a cat. . . . Oh, it wasn't—it couldn't have been—burglars!" she wailed.

"Hush, Mother. Please," said Pat, passing quickly behind her and closing the door. "Nothing has been taken as far as we can discover."

"Then it was a horrid burglar,Patricia! Oh, how dreadful! And Morgan stopping away all this time. He ought to be here. We must let him know at once. Have you telegraphed him? Doctor Stafford, you must let him know, immediately! His business can't be so important."

She caught the glance which passed between the doctor and Patty.

"Oh!" she cried. "You are keeping me in the dark. You both know something that you haven't told me. What is it? Where is Morgan, Doctor Stafford, and why don't you send for him?" Suddenly she turned to her daughter. "Answer me, Patricia," she said, peremptorily. "I will be answered. We must send for your uncle Morgan. Where is he?"

"Better tell her, Pat," said the doctor, quietly. "We can't hope——"

"Mother," said Patricia, gently, "Mother, don't be alarmed. We believe that Uncle Morgan is all right—but we don't know where he is."

Mrs. Carrington sank into a chair. Her head dropped back and she closed her eyes.

"You can't mean it," she said, faintly. "Morgan gone—and without a word to me! It isn't possible. Doctor Stafford! You said——"

"Yes, I know," interrupted the doctor, hastily. "I shouldn't have done it. I can see that now. But we hoped he would be back soon—long before this—that he would explain everything—that there was no need to worry you. It was my idea. Pat isn't at all to blame."

"I agreed with Doctor Stafford, Mother," said Patricia, quickly. "I'm as much to blame as he. But we only did it to spare you. You must see that. There was nothing to be done."

"Nothing, Patricia? You've done nothing! And perhaps poor Morgan has been—— Ugh!" she shuddered. "He may have been done away with or have met with some horrible accident. Oh, you should have told me!"

The doctor assured her that they had done everything that was humanly possible. That they felt certain, from the hospital reports, that Carrington could not have met with an accident. That they had refrained from appealing to the police by advice of counsel.

"But I'm not sure now," added the doctor, looking about him, "I'm not sure now, Pat, that we ought not to get an experienced detective on the case. This attempt at burglary, which may, for all we know, have been successful——"

"You mean that the thief may have found what he was after without our realizing that anything was missing?" said Patty, eagerly.

"Yes. I mean just that. We could neither of us know what the significance may have been of a given paper, we'll say—something which would have had no apparent value."

"I see," said Patricia, slowly. "That does put a different face on the whole matter, doesn't it, Doctor S. O. S.?"

"Yes, I think it does," said the doctor, "and I believe that we ought to communicate with Thornton again. Franklin Thornton was Morgan's lawyer," he explained to Mrs. Carrington, "and an old friend

both to him and to me. It was on his advice——"

"Oh, go to see him at once, Doctor Stafford," said the little lady, clasping her plump hands in an appealing gesture. "I'm sure we ought to have someone with brains to ferret out this dreadful mystery. Won't you go to see him?"

"I'll do better than that," said the doctor, promptly. "I'll get him on the telephone. He may not be in his office, since it's Saturday, but I'll find out where he is. We can trust his advice, Pat"—he turned to the girl—"and he'll know a good man to put on the case, I hope, though Thornton isn't a criminal lawyer."

During the subsequent telephone conversation, Mrs. Carrington, recovering rapidly from the severe shock to the delicate nerves of which she so often boasted, became more and more acutely aware of her dishabille. She was conscious that her face, which ordinarily had the appearance of an elaborately retouched and coloured photograph, must look wan and gray in the cold morning light, and presently, with a murmured word to Patricia, she withdrew.

The girl had been listening eagerly to the doctor's questions and answers and had gathered that Thornton's advice, in view of last night's developments, was to put an experienced private detective on the case at once. There had been some delay while Thornton looked up addresses, and when the doctor finally raised the detective bureau it appeared that the man Thornton's confidential clerk had recom-

mended was away on a case and wasn't expected back for several days.

"They say that the man they're sending—Powell his name is—is just as experienced a man as the other," said the doctor to Pat, as he hung up the receiver, "and we'll have to hope for the best. We can't wait."

"No," said Patricia, "I feel as if I couldn't bear another moment of inaction. When will this Mr. Powell be here?"

"He's leaving on the next train. We'd better look it up and meet him at the station, don't you think?"

"Oh, yes," said Pat, and then, struck with a sudden thought aroused by the mention of trains, she clasped her hands together in distress. "Do you know what I've been and gone and done, Doctor S. O. S.? I've clean forgotten Mr. Turnbull! What do you suppose he'll think of me? He will have missed his train and—oh, dear!"

"He isn't the first man that's been disappointed by a taxi driver, Pat. Don't let it worry you, little girl. Meet him this afternoon and apologize nicely, and I'm sure he won't have the heart to be angry with you. Now, let me see. Have you a time-table here?"

"Oh, yes," said Pat, producing one from her pocket, her mind quickly reverting to the more absorbing subject. "We must be sure to meet the detective. I'll get the car out at once."

The doctor sympathized heartily with her desire to be immediately up and doing but, after examining the time-table, he pointed out that Powell could not, by any possibility, reach there for an hour and a half. Partly from a sense of duty and partly from a desire to give Pat something else to think about, he suggested that they should occupy the time by running over to Harford and making the round of his patients.

The girl assented eagerly. They closed and locked the study door, and while the doctor went over to get his medicine case, she ran upstairs and explained matters briefly to her mother. Mrs. Carrington, absorbed in the mysteries of her toilet, agreed absently that Patricia would be better for a little fresh air and, upon the assurance that she would not be late in meeting the detective, she was allowed to depart.

It happened, therefore, that when, somewhat later in the morning, a well-set-up young officer knocked at Morgan Carrington's front door, Mrs. Carrington was the only person there to receive him.

In spite of her crushing anxieties, she felt that she had achieved a very satisfactory toilet, and it was with a comforting sense of looking the part of the patrician chatelaine that she descended the stairs and met the stranger in the hall.

He was standing just inside the door, his cap in his hand.

"I'm very sorry to trouble you," he said, advancing toward her, "but I'm anxious to see Mr. Carring-

ton. Your man says that he isn't here and I hoped you could tell me when he's expected back or where he could be found in town."

The question unnerved Mrs. Carrington. She was at a loss how to reply. Patricia and the doctor had both impressed upon her rather shallow mind that it was important to keep Morgan's disappearance a secret. The reason was not so clear to her, but they had made a great point of it. To gain time for consideration she said, graciously:

"Won't you come in and rest? You must have walked up from the station and those dreadful hills are so fearfully tiring."

"Thank you, Mrs. Carrington," he said, smiling, and followed her into the living room.

It did not strike her as at all unusual that he should know her name at once. If she had thought anything about it, she would have supposed that he had learned it from the butler.

"You're a soldier, aren't you," she remarked, unnecessarily, "and you've been fighting for us all, over there in France! I know, you see. I can tell by your service stripes. Oh, it's wonderful, wonderful to think of the way in which all you dear boys responded to the call to arms! Your mother must be very proud of her boy!"

"My mother, Mrs. Carrington," he said, slowly, "is dead. She died long ago. So did my father. I've been on my own, except for a guardian, since I was a little shaver. You see I was obviously the

sort of chap to go into the army. No one, especially, to worry about me at home." He smiled a little sadly.

"Oh, you poor boy," cried Mrs. Carrington, sweetly. "You've just come home—and no one to welcome you? Oh, it's too sad!"

"I didn't expect any one to meet me. I came sooner than I had hoped, so you see I wasn't disappointed, exactly." He was regarding her keenly but covertly all the while. "Mr. Carrington will be home soon, do you think?" he added, smoothly.

The question was put direct and required a definite answer. Under the straight glance of the clear brown eyes Mrs. Carrington shifted uneasily in her chair and coughed discreetly behind her tiny handkerchief.

The young man waited in silence.

"Why," said Mrs. Carrington, hesitatingly, after a pause which she could no longer prolong, "why, really—I don't know just when Mr. Carrington will be back. I can hardly say."

Her manner was distinctly troubled. The soldier leaned forward in his chair.

"I've come a long way to see Mr. Carrington," he said. "I came out to see him yesterday, but they told me he wasn't here."

The surprise in her face was genuine. Of that he was sure.

"Of course no one told me you were here," she said, plaintively. "It's too bad, too bad—But then I'm

told nothing. Everything, big and little, I have to find out for myself."

The young man rapidly reviewed the circumstances which had presented themselves to his notice and added to them this last. The girl who had taken him up in her car, the girl who had answered so promptly to the name of "Patty," had not spoken to her mother of having seen him. Nothing strange in that, perhaps. But added to the fact that she was driving a taxicab—a girl of her evident social training? . . . Did her mother know about the cab business, and was it that? . . . Why didn't they know when Mr. Carrington would be back? . . . Somehow, the girl didn't look it—but driving a cab might have been a youthful prank and she might have been afraid of admitting to him that she was sufficiently acquainted with Morgan Carrington to know his plans. If that were the case, why, then, should Mrs. Carrington be so reticent and appear so uneasy?

These reflections passed so quickly through his mind that there was scarcely a perceptible pause in the conversation.

"It doesn't matter in the least," he said, referring to the fact that she had not been told of his previous visit to Stonehill, "but I'd be very glad to get in touch with Mr. Carrington. Is he in New York, by any chance?"

Mrs. Carrington raised her hands and let them fall with a hopeless gesture. Tears of mingled annoy-

ance and nervousness stood in her large, pale-blue eyes. "I really don't know where he is," she admitted, sadly. It was no use. She positively could not think of anything else to say to this persistent young man. Why didn't the doctor and Patricia come back and rescue her?

"You don't know where he is?" repeated the soldier, wonderingly. "Surely you can't mean, Mrs. Carrington—pardon me, but that sounded as if you meant—as if you were troubled in some way about Mr. Carrington's absence. It isn't possible——"

"Oh, I think everything dreadful is possible in this horrid world! Nothing is too bad to be true," she said, despairingly. "Everything has been so disappointing ever since we came North. And now Morgan—Mr. Carrington, I mean—gone! Gone off without a word to me—to any of us!" Completely unnerved, the poor, weak little woman buried her face in her handkerchief. "He's disappeared," she wailed, softly. "He went away nearly three weeks ago and we haven't heard a word from him since."

The young man drew in his breath sharply.

"Disappeared! A man like—like Mr. Carrington! Why, it isn't possible!"

"But it's true, nevertheless. They tried to keep it from me. I only found out this morning—and I'm so anxious and worried. I'm really not myself at all."

"No, no. Of course not," said the soldier. And all the while he was thinking hard.

"Mrs. Carrington," he went on after a pause in which her sobs had partially subsided, "I hardly know what to say. I—" he hesitated, and then, as if his mind were finally made up, he said—"I don't know how I could be of service to you, but I'd be glad to help you in any way that I could. My name—"if he hesitated again, Louise Carrington was too agitated to observe it—"my name is John Garrison. I was with your nephew, Ned Driscoll, in France. We were together on the Rhine and when I was sent home sooner than I expected, he asked me to look Mr. Carrington up. He's very fond of his uncle, you know. Ned and I are very—" the slight pause was, no doubt, due to a masculine diffidence in expressing an emotion—"very close friends. We were in the same class at Harvard and we've seen service together. I may say that Ned saved my life more than once. He may not be back for a couple of months, possibly more. Could you, possibly, in a way—let me take his place? I'd do—well, a good deal for Ned. If there was any way that I could be of service to his people——"

"It's very good of you, Mr—" glancing at his shoulder straps, Mrs. Carrington corrected herself, hastily—"Captain Garrison. I don't know what you could do and I shouldn't have spoken of Mr. Carrington's having disappeared. I must beg of you not to let it go any farther."

"You may be quite sure about that," said Garrison, quietly.

At that moment they heard a motor car coming swiftly up the drive. It stopped before the door. There was a mingled hum of voices. A light foot ran rapidly up the steps, across the porch and through the hall, and Patricia Carrington appeared in the doorway.

CHAPTER XVI

"MOTHER!" said Patricia—and stopped short, perceiving that her mother was not alone.

John Garrison rose quickly to his feet and, turning, met her eyes. The girl was startled at seeing him, that was evident. She held his gaze for a swift second, then turned a troubled, inquiring glance at her mother.

"This is Captain Garrison, a friend of Ned Driscoll's," said Mrs. Carrington, presenting him. "My daughter, Captain Garrison."

The young man bowed.

"I'm very glad to meet you, Captain Garrison," said Patricia, gravely. "Please sit down. I must speak to my mother. You'll excuse her a moment, I know."

She drew Mrs. Carrington out into the hall as Doctor Stafford and a strange man entered the front door.

"Will you let me present Mr. Powell, Mother," said Patricia, in a low voice.

"Glad to make your acquaintance, ma'am," said the detective, in his best society manner.

He was a tall, overfed, overdressed person, with

slightly protruding colourless eyes and a humorous, though predatory, nose and mouth.

"We'll make short work of this little affair," he went on, in a loud, assured voice. "Disappearance, eh? And attempted burglary? Nice little job, eh, what?"

Patricia raised a warning hand and motioned with her head toward the living room.

The detective was quicker to take a hint than one would have imagined from his appearance. He raised his eyebrows questioningly, nodded his comprehension that the room was occupied, and slapped himself playfully on the wrist. Powell often said of himself that he might be large but he was "awful cute."

"If Mr. Powell wants to see the study at once, we'll have to go through the living room," said Patricia, "and there's someone there."

"Who is it?" asked Doctor Stafford, in a guarded tone.

"A Captain Garrison," answered Patricia. "He's just back from France. Says he's a friend of Ned Driscoll." She met the doctor's eye and held it.

"Same man?" Stafford's lips formed the words in an almost soundless aside.

Pat nodded.

"Hum-m-m." The doctor drew in a quick breath. "Well—there's no harm in our passing through the room." After a second's consideration, he spoke on, quickly. "It won't be necessary to

present us or to explain. Come into the study as soon as you can, Pat. Now, if you please, Mr. Powell——"

The doctor led the way through the back of the long living room, unlocked the study door, and the two men disappeared.

A little later, Patricia joined them. She found the detective with his coat off, hard at work. Doctor Stafford stood by looking on with eager interest.

"Have you found anything?" she asked, swiftly.

"Not anything that I can make head or tail of," answered the doctor. "I've told Mr. Powell everything we know, and he seems to think——"

"We won't jump to conclusions, Miss," interrupted the detective. "We'll leave that to amachewers," and he glanced tolerantly at the doctor. "There ain't an awful lot here to go on but, offhand, I should say the chances were that your uncle had got himself mixed up with some secret society. That whoever came in here last night was looking for some secret papers that Mr. Carrington had got hold of. He may have found 'em, even, for all we can tell. I'd make a guess that the society, whatever it is, wasn't altogether crazy about the way your uncle was carrying things on and maybe he'd vamoosed to avoid trouble. His taking all that money away with him looks bad. Might have been afraid they'd get hold of it.—No, that cat won't fight. How could they hope to get it out of the bank?" He scratched his bald head. "I can't make that fit in exactly,

unless they thought he might have doubled back and hidden it here before he dropped out of sight. The doctor, here, doesn't think he could possibly have done that—but you never can tell." He paused and appeared lost in the contemplation of possibilities. At last he raised his head. "You leave it to me, Miss," he added, confidently. "You leave it to little Willy. I've cracked harder nuts than this, you can bet your life. You and the doctor run along now and let me think."

"It's one o'clock, Mr. Powell, and lunch is just going on the table. Won't you have something to eat?" said Patricia, mindful of her duties as hostess. "I could send you in a tray if you want to go on with your work."

"That's just the very ticket, thank you, Miss. Send me in a bite. I'd like to take a peek at your butler, anyway. Send him along when you're ready. No hurry."

When they had closed the study door, Pat touched the doctor's arm to detain him. The living room was empty but voices could be heard coming from the far end of the porch.

"He's staying to lunch, Doctor S. O. S., this soldier who calls himself Captain Garrison," she said, just above her breath. "Mother asked him—she's so fearfully hospitable—and he's accepted. You must stay, too. I want you to see what you think of him. He seems awfully nice and pleasant and kind. I found out that Mother's let the cat out of the bag

about Uncle Morgan. He knows now why I couldn't tell him when Uncle Morgan would be back, but he hasn't let Mother suspect, evidently, that he had ever seen me before this morning."

"Must be 'quick in the uptak,' as my old Scotch nurse used to say," said Doctor Stafford, musingly. "I only had a glimpse of him, but he looked like a boy who could keep his own counsel. I don't think there's much harm in his knowing that Morgan has disappeared, especially as he's a friend of Ned's."

"But is he?" said Patricia, shaking her head, with an excited gleam of perplexity tinged with amusement in her eyes. "Is his name really Garrison?"

"Must be," said the doctor, promptly. "If it were Ned, as you suspected at first, he'd have been sure to say so when he found the trouble you and your mother are in."

"I thought that, too, at first," said Pat, doubtfully. "I can't see now what object he could possibly have in deceiving us, but, Doctor S. O. S."—she leaned toward him and her voice sank to a whisper—"whatever his name is, I'm quite, quite sure that it isn't Garrison."

"Why, my dear child!" exclaimed the doctor, startled. "What reason can you have for saying that?"

"When I slipped upstairs to wash my hands a few moments ago," she replied, a trifle breathlessly, "I took another look at that photograph of the Harvard crew. I had it in my room and I wanted to make

sure that I couldn't have been mistaken in the man. I wasn't. It's the same face. I'm sure of it."

"Well," began the doctor.

"Yes. I know. They might both have been on the crew, as you said. That's true. But listen to this. I happened to turn the picture over and there—I don't know why we didn't notice it before, except that the back of the photograph was gray and the writing was in blue pencil and hardly showed——"

"Yes?" said the doctor, eagerly.

"Well, there was a list of names on the back. I counted them and the number corresponded to the number of boys in the crew. And, Doctor S. O. S., Ned's name was there, his last name, at least. They were all just the last names—and there was no 'Garrison' there."

The doctor whistled softly.

"Now, what do you think?" asked Pat, with a little flash of triumph.

"Dear me, I don't know what to think," said the doctor. "Why should Ned come here incognito? What possible object could he have?"

"I can't imagine that," said Patricia, excitedly, "but it would be rather fun, wouldn't it? He knows that none of us has ever seen him. Oh, if it weren't for poor Uncle Morgan, I think it would be a great lark! Of course, we mustn't let him imagine that we guess. That would spoil it all."

"Lunch's se'ved, Miss Patty," said Sam, solemnly, from the doorway.

"All right, Sam. Tell Mother, please," said Patricia, "and when you go into the kitchen, tell Lily to put some lunch on a tray and you take it in to the man you'll find in Mr. Carrington's study."

The darky rolled his great eyes as who should say, "What next?" and returned to his duties.

It was a pleasant luncheon, all things considered. Doctor Stafford, in his quiet, friendly way, took pains to draw the young soldier out, and John Garrison responded with apparent frankness. The doctor, as was natural, questioned him about his service in France and noted, without comment, that Garrison had been in all the important actions in which he knew, from Morgan Carrington, that Ned Driscoll had participated. There was nothing strange in this, perhaps, since Garrison had stated that he and Ned had been together almost from the very first.

"Well," said the doctor, "you certainly have been through a great deal, Captain Garrison, and you must be glad to be home once more. You'll be leaving the service soon now, I suppose."

"Yes, thank Heaven," answered Garrison. "I get my discharge on Monday and I'll have to be looking about for something to do."

"Have you any plans yet?" asked the doctor, with polite interest.

"No. Not yet. I'm rather at loose ends. I haven't even a home to go to. I'll have to find a

place to live, first of all, and it's going to be a little difficult. I hate New York in the summer time. I'd much rather be out of town, but I have no idea, at present, where to go." He spoke slowly—tentatively, the doctor thought.

Through the whole meal Mrs. Carrington had been, for her, unsually silent. Now she broke into the conversation with her customary irrelevance.

"I wonder, Captain Garrison, if you are, by any chance, kin to the New York Garrisons I used to know when I was a girl."

"It's not a very uncommon name," said the young man, smiling a trifle uneasily, "and there are a great many Garrisons in New York, I believe."

"The Jane Garrison I knew," said Mrs. Carrington, "belonged to a very rich and very old New York family. I met her at White Sulphur Springs. She was very beautiful, I remember, and extremely popular. She made an unfortunate match, though, that is, in one way. Randolph Peyton's family was quite as good as hers but he had very little money. I heard that they settled at his home in Virginia and that they were very happy. She was a lovely girl. Was she a connection of yours, do you know, Captain Garrison?"

"I've heard of Mrs. Peyton," said the young soldier, slowly, "and I think she is a connection of the family."

Mrs. Carrington beamed. She had an instinct for discovering the social advantages of those with

whom she came in contact and was never quite satisfied until she had placed an acquaintance against a definite background. If this young man was one of the New York Garrisons, his character, in her eyes, was most effectively set off by the known wealth and position of the ancestry behind him.

"That's very interesting, very interesting, indeed," she said, brightly. "I remember"—and rambled off into a long series of unimportant incidents connected with the social triumphs of her girlhood.

Garrison listened with flattering attention, though his eyes roved often to Patricia's face and he thought, within himself, that she was surely the most lovely creature he had ever had the good fortune to behold. Her quiet manner, her sincere, steadfast eyes, her gracious friendship with the old physician, all struck him as being beautiful and appealing to the last degree, and he wondered what freak—what necessity, perhaps—had induced her to take up the incongruous profession of a public chauffeur. Had it anything to do with her uncle's strange and unaccountable absence? The whole situation was vastly intriguing. He had an instinctive feeling that Mrs. Carrington knew nothing of the taxicab business, and when luncheon was finished and they all strolled out on the porch, he was not very much surprised at Miss Carrington's taking advantage of the first opportunity of speaking to him alone.

The doctor had detained Mrs. Carrington for a moment just inside the front door and Patricia and

the young man had moved on down to the south end of the porch where, she said, they could get a better view of the Palisades and the river.

"You'll think it very odd, Captain Garrison," she began at once, hurriedly, in a low voice, "but I'm going to ask you please, please not to let my mother know about——"

"The taxi stuff," he said, smiling amusedly as she hesitated. "I guessed she wasn't very well acquainted with you in your professional capacity. I guessed it right away and I haven't said anything to make her suspect. And I won't," with a shake of the head. "You can depend on me. Does the doctor know?"

"Yes," nodded Patricia. "I don't think he altogether approves, poor dear, but he's been perfectly darling about it. My heart was set on it and he realizes the necessity——" She stopped.

"Of what? Do tell me, Miss Carrington! I'd like—I'd like awfully to be—to help you, if I could. I haven't much to recommend me. I'm not much of a chap and you don't know me yet at all. But I am—you could trust me in this. I'd never abuse your confidence. I can see that you're in some kind of a tight place. It must worry you terribly, your uncle's having gone off so strangely. And it worries me, too—on Ned's account, you know," he added, hastily. "I feel as if I ought to try to do whatever he would do if he were here. Can't you trust me? Won't you let me help you?"

Patricia looked at him a little oddly. Everything that he had said—his hesitation when asked about the Garrison family—his concern about her uncle Morgan's disappearance—his desire to be of service to her and to her mother—all pointed one way. And there was the photograph. To be sure, his hair and eyes were lighter than the Carringtons' and he bore no family resemblance—took after his father, possibly. But if he were Ned Driscoll, why didn't he say so? It was very strange—but, then, so many strange things had happened. Somehow she felt certain that this really was her cousin and that, for some reason best known to himself, he wanted them all to remain in the dark. Possibly he had found out already that his fortune had vanished with the disappearance of Morgan Carrington. Possibly he might suspect—could he suspect that they—that she—had benefited in any way? The improbable idea was too dreadful. It decided her all in a moment, and she said:

"I don't see how you can help us. We've employed a detective and we're doing everything we can think of to clear things up. Doctor Stafford has been wonderful—wonderfully kind. There are a lot of things that are hard to explain—that must seem very odd to a stranger." She glanced up at him sharply, but his eyes betrayed only a serious, eager interest, and she went on: "But I think—I think I would like you to know that I'm not running

Uncle Morgan's—Mr. Carrington's car as a taxi just for fun. I—I need the money. We must have something to live on and it's the only thing I know how to do."

"So! That's it." Garrison's face showed wonder and surprise tinged with a very genuine admiration. "You didn't waste any time taking the situation in hand, did you? But do you mean to say that he—Mr. Carrington—left you absolutely without funds? Good Lord, what a rotten position for a girl to be in! I wish—oh, I wish there was something I could do! Can't you think of anything—any way I could be of service? I'd do anything—anything."

"It is a lovely view, isn't it?" Mrs. Carrington's soft voice almost made him jump. "I didn't altogether like it at first, those great rocks across the river looked so hard and stony. But I'm getting used to it, and the sunsets are really quite delightful. You must see some of our sunsets, Captain Garrison." She spoke as if they were arranged and exhibited for the exclusive benefit of herself and her guests. "You must come out often," she went on, with Southern cordiality. "Any of Ned Driscoll's friends, especially men who have risked their lives in the service of their country, are most welcome in our house. You must make our house your home, remember, and come whenever you can."

"Don't say that unless you mean it, Mrs. Carrington," the young soldier laughed. "You'll find me

camping on your doorstep, if you aren't careful. That sort of invitation isn't safe to give a homeless wanderer like myself."

"Oh, but I do mean it," cried Mrs. Carrington. "Come as often and stay as long as you please. You dear boys are always most welcome."

"May I come again? Please let me," said the young man quietly to Patricia a few moments later as he took her hand in his at parting. "I want to, dreadfully, but I won't come without your permission."

His eagerness strengthened Pat's assurance that she was, in reality, talking to her cousin, but she made no sign. If he could play a game, so could she.

"You must make this house your home, as Mother said," she answered, with a little, quizzical look in her eyes, the cause of which Captain Garrison was at a loss to determine.

CHAPTER XVII

"WHAT are you doing at this time of night, Doctor S. O. S.?"

The old man, in his shirt sleeves, his clothing protected by a long white apron, turned with a smile as Patricia came through his kitchen door.

"Hello, Pat, little comrade. Did you get a good rest?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed. I slept for two hours. But you haven't been resting, Doctor dear, have you? You don't mean to tell me you've done all of that this evening" and she pointed to a long row of small jars, the last of which he was now filling with luscious, ruby-coloured preserves. "Oh, why didn't you ask me to help you? I had no idea——"

"No, my dear, I didn't tell you that Marco picked strawberries in your garden all the morning. They had to be put up right away, and I knew you'd insist on helping. So I kept it a dark and crimson secret. I managed very easily."

"Oh, it's too bad, Doctor S. O. S.!"

"No, no. It's almost too good. Taste it, if you don't believe me." He gave her a spoon and the nearly empty white enamel kettle.

"Simply my idea of Heaven," Pat announced, solemnly.

The doctor laughed.

"That seems to comport architecturally with my boyhood's idea of God," he said. "I never asked anybody, because I knew perfectly well what God looked like. He was always, to me, a tall old man with a long white beard. (That came out of the pictures in a 'Child's Life of Christ' I had.) He was always dressed much as I am now and was entirely occupied in putting up my favourite strawberry preserves."

"But what an absurd fancy, Doctor S. O. S.," Pat gurgled between mouthfuls. "What ever made you think of anything so cunning and ridiculous?"

"Why, you see, Pat," answered the doctor, with a twinkle in his eye, "I was brought up on the Presbyterian catechism. I couldn't remember much of it, but there was one phrase which I completely understood and which appealed most tenderly to my childish imagination. It was, 'The Lord makes preserves and keeps us.'"

Patty's laughter, like a peal of little bells, rang through the kitchen.

"Oh, how darling!" she said. "What an adorable little boy you must have been, Doctor S. O. S."

"I wasn't," said the doctor, promptly. "I was a perfect little devil, if you must know. I was quite aware of it at the time, having had my attention called to the fact by various admiring relatives, and

I didn't care much, because I hated the cold so and I had no ear for music. Having my hair curled, like the little angel boys in pictures, and sitting on a cold cloud, playing a harp, made no appeal to me and the fires of hell seemed comforting in comparison."

"Well, you'd better watch out or you won't go there," said Pat, still laughing. "A man who'll work himself to death to let a lazy girl sleep! You shouldn't have done it, Doctor S. O. S. If you go on like this, I'll be nothing but a sleeping partner—couldn't call me a silent partner, exactly. But you really should have told me that there was all of this to do."

"Oh, it wasn't hard to manage, in the least," said the doctor, "and the firm couldn't afford to waste all this good material, you know. We're going to make a comfortable penny before the season's over, you and I together, Pat. Besides, I hadn't a bad night last night as you had. You needed the rest.—What was that?"

They both started as a soft knock sounded on the kitchen door. The doctor opened it at once.

"Miss Patty yere, Docter? Yas, suh, I sees her. Miss Patty, chile, Sam en ah gwine out fer de evenin' ef y' don't mine." Lily's manner was subdued and mournful. "We-all's havin' a big holiness week at de Ebenezer chapel in Yonkers en hit'll be good fer our souls."

"What's the matter, Lily?" asked the doctor,

kindly. "You seem sort of sad. Aren't you feeling well?"

"Naw, suh, ah ain't feelin' right well, en' dat's de troof. Ah ain't been feelin' scrumptious fer a long time. Mah stomach's powerful weak, Docter. Ah felt so bad all day, ah got mahse'f some po'k chops en green peppers fer mah dinner en' ah couldn't eat but two chops. Naw, suh. Ah done mek dat lovely lobster bluebird, what Mis' Carrin'ton ordered, fer lunch en 'twas all ah could do to touch it. Des ate one er two platefuls en' dat was all. 'Tek hit away, Sam,' ah sez. 'No use wastin' dem riches ob de worl' on dem ez ain't long fer dis yearth!'"

"Oh, cheer up, Lily. You'll be all right soon," said the doctor. "I don't think your symptoms are really alarming."

The girl muttered something about "hants not bodderin' white fokses," and, having received permission from her young mistress, took herself sadly away.

"What she says about 'hants' is all nonsense, of course," said the doctor, as he closed the door after her, "but, Pat, I don't like your being so unprotected over there. Won't you let me come over to sleep? I'm old, and not much use if anything should happen——"

"You're not a bit old, Doctor S. O. S.," said Pat, indignantly, "and you're a whole lot of use, but we'll get along all right. Mother is quite satisfied by what Mr. Powell told her, and it would only arouse

her fears again. He seemed confident that we wouldn't have any more nocturnal visitors, especially if we kept the lower floor lighted. He thought that was a very good idea of mine."

"Just the same, I wish you had a real man in the house," said the doctor, anxiously. "Powell seemed very certain, but——"

"What did you think of Mr. Powell, Doctor S. O. S.? Were you satisfied with the way he took hold of things?"

"Well," said the doctor, slowly, "he was thorough, as far as I could see, and his not finding anything to the purpose was to be expected, I suppose. I'm afraid that these detectives who can trace a criminal from an eyelash are only to be found in fiction. He agreed with Frank Thornton that the records of cases of disappearance were all in favour of the theory that Morgan is still alive and well. We'll hope so, anyway, and try to possess our souls in patience."

But the days of watchful waiting which followed were hard on all of them. Mrs. Carrington mourned, like a dove, more or less continuously. She cheered up only when John Garrison appeared, as he did with satisfactory frequency. He talked to her a great deal, though his eyes followed Patty whenever they could do so unobserved. Nearly a week had passed and Garrison had been twice to Stonehill when, one afternoon, Pat, with a high colour in her cheeks, ran into the doctor's garden.

The old man was busy making rings of cutworm

food around some young tomato plants. He rose to his feet when she called his name.

"Oh, Doctor S. O. S.!" she cried. "I've found the reason. I'm sure I've found the reason!"

"Reason? Reason for what, Pat?" he asked, coming toward her. "There's reason in all things, but I don't suppose you mean that. What is it, child?"

She glanced at Marco's back which was turned toward them as he busily weeded a long row of beets.

"Come into the house a minute," she said, beckoning to the doctor. "I want to show you something."

"Start on the onions, Marco, when you get through with that," said Doctor Stafford. "I'll be back in a little while."

But Marco must have been very tired for, as soon as the doctor and Patricia had entered the house, he left the garden by the back path, made his way unostentatiously around the house, lay down in the shade close to the wall under the living-room windows and, apparently, fell fast asleep.

"Now, Pat," said the doctor, eagerly, "let's have it!"

He motioned the girl to a chair and himself sat close beside her.

"Well, you see, Doctor, it was like this. I was putting poor Uncle Morgan's woollen clothes away in camphor. There have been a lot of moths flying about and I didn't dare to leave them hanging in the closet any longer." Pat's voice was tense with excitement.

"Yes, yes. Go on," said the doctor, quickly.

"I felt in all the pockets, of course. You never can tell what a man may leave in his pockets. Soiled handkerchiefs—change—cough drops—all sorts of things I found—and among them, this letter," and she held out to the doctor a torn envelope with a bulky enclosure.

He took it quickly and looked at the address—"Mr. Morgan Carrington, 893 Broad Road, Stonehill, N. Y., U. S. A." It was written in a firm, direct, masculine handwriting and in the upper left-hand corner were the words, "Officer's mail."

"From Ned Driscoll, of course," said the doctor, with raised eyebrows.

"Yes," said Pat, hastily. "Now turn it over."

The old man did so and found that a considerable portion of the envelope had been torn away by the impatient hand which had opened it—had opened it eagerly, weeks ago, before this dark cloud had fallen on the house of Carrington. Where was that hand now and what was it doing while the old doctor looked at its characteristic work?

"I didn't take the letter out," said Pat, breaking into the doctor's thoughts, "but I saw my name and I couldn't help reading just those few lines. All in a flash, it came to me. Read it, Doctor S. O. S. I'm sure Uncle Morgan wouldn't mind—just that bit."

Thus urged, Stafford bent his head, adjusted his glasses, and read:

can I agree with your wishes in
my cousin Patricia, without ever
eyes on her?

That was all. The doctor raised his head quickly and met Pat's dancing eyes.

"Don't you see, Doctor S. O. S.? Don't you see it all?" she cried. "Uncle Morgan must have taken it into his head that Ned Driscoll and I—that—— We're only sort of half-cousins, you know. . . . He must have felt that it would be a good idea—— Oh, don't you see what I mean?"

"By George!" the doctor grinned. "The old matchmaker! I wouldn't have suspected it of him and yet—I know how sincerely he wanted to provide for you. He may have felt that this would be the best way for you both and——"

"And when Ned came and found Uncle Morgan wasn't here," Pat interrupted, impetuously, "he thought he'd just look things over without letting any one know who he was. It's like a fairy tale, isn't it, Doctor S. O. S.? Oh, I think it's so amusing and romantic!"

"By Jove, that would be a lark, wouldn't it?" said the doctor. It was just the sort of thing that he knew would have appealed to him when he was the age of Ned Driscoll.

"We'll just go on pretending that we don't know," said Pat, breathlessly. "I wouldn't, for the world, have him suspect. And when he comes out again—— You know, Doctor S. O. S.," she broke

off, "he's been sounding Mother on the possibility of his coming out here to board somewhere until he can find a place. Since it's surely Ned, wouldn't it be the best thing, in all the circumstances, to have him board with us? It's his house, really, you know, in a way, but I think it would be right for him to pay for his food—and it would be a help. I'm not making nearly so much with the car as I had hoped. You see, while there are bunches of people on all the afternoon trains, I can only take one or two from each, and there are only about four or five trains that I can possibly meet. I have only my one steady customer besides you, and even he isn't altogether satisfactory."

The doctor looked up sharply.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Well," said Pat, slowly, "he'd been drinking the other night, I'm sure, and yet I didn't dare to take the wheel away from him. He drove perfectly. There was no trouble about that, and his daughter didn't seem at all uneasy. He wasn't—drunk—you know. Just—well—very much exhilarated. There wasn't anything to be alarmed about, really, only I didn't exactly like it."

"No," said the doctor, with a worried crease between his shaggy gray eyebrows. "No, I should think not. And I don't like it, either, Pat. I wish you wouldn't do it any more."

"But how can I help it, Doctor S. O. S.? We must have money, and now that I have my chauffeur's

license"—she had made a hurried trip to town on the day after her encounter with the policeman at the station, and had procured that necessary document —"I'd feel rather silly not to use it—to give the whole thing up because one of my clients had been lunching 'not wisely but too well.'"

She passed the thing off lightly, and the good old doctor tried not to let it worry him, but when, on the following day, the man they still called John Garrison appeared and, after several false starts, put before them the proposition that he should take up temporary quarters in Morgan Carrington's house, Stafford was distinctly relieved.

The matter was soon concluded, and the very next day John Garrison, who had dropped his military title, presented himself in a civilian suit, well cut but somewhat worn, carrying two heavy suitcases.

Mrs. Carrington received him effusively. Was he not one of the New York Garrisons? That, in itself, was sufficient recommendation in her eyes. And it seemed natural and right that they should have a guest in the house, especially a friend of Ned Driscoll. Patricia watched the young man making up to her mother with a thrill of amused romance. Her own manner toward him was quite confidential so far as the questions involved in her uncle's disappearance were concerned, and they discussed freely her chosen occupation of public chauffeur, of which he seemed not entirely to approve. But toward her own thoughts and feelings she maintained a quiet

reserve. Since he thought fit to visit them incognito, this cousin of hers should have to work for his discoveries as to her character, she said to herself, and entered into the thrilling game with all the secret diversion which the situation afforded.

The old doctor was delighted with his young and virile coadjutor. It was a relief to his mind to have him staying at the Carrington house. The fact that it had been entered once was hardly proof, Powell to the contrary, notwithstanding, that it would never be entered again, and the young man's presence there was a distinct protection. He was trustworthy, of that the doctor felt sure. He had made it his business to see as much as possible of him and had been pleased with everything he saw. Garrison was frankness itself up to a certain point, but Stafford noted with well-concealed entertainment that he became unostentatiously uncommunicative when the talk drifted toward a question of his family and friends. There was no doubt that he was intensely interested in the problem of Carrington's disappearance. He evidently thought it unnecessary to disguise that fact, and gradually he was put in possession of all the evidence in the case.

Patricia shrewdly suspected, though he gave no hint of having learned it, that he knew there was no money left at the Carstairs Trust Company. He seemed anxious to find a job and went into town every day for the first few days of his stay in the old white house on Broad Road. He came back each

night with evident discouragement. It seemed very difficult for him to find anything to do and, remembering the loss of his fortune, Pat became more and more concerned. How could she take his money at the end of the week if, by that time, he had failed to find an income-producing occupation? She showed so much sympathy and concern that Garrison was encouraged to tell her all his difficulties.

"I've had a good education, as far as that goes," he said, as they sat together, one evening, on the piazza steps, looking off toward the late sunset. "It ought not to be difficult to find something to do. I didn't specialize in anything, that seems to be the main trouble. There was to have been an opening for me, of a sort, when I came back—but—lots of things have happened since I went away. I wasn't expected back so soon—and the position hasn't materialized—yet. If I could only think of something to do to fill in the interim. I know a good deal about motor cars. I might try to get into an automobile place—as a demonstrator, perhaps." He spoke slowly, his eyes fixed on the girl's face.

Suddenly he saw it brighten and she turned to him with a little eager gesture.

"Oh," she cried. "Oh, Mr. Garrison, if we only had another car!"

The use of the word "we" brought a quick flush to his sunburned face, but he said nothing and Patricia went on impetuously:

"There's more business than I can take advantage

of right here in Stonehill. If my car were twins, they'd both be full for nearly all the evening trains. You wouldn't make a lot, of course, but it would be something to tide over. Only——"

"I think I might be able to get a car," said John Garrison, excitedly. "To tell you the truth, I'd thought about just this possibility. But wouldn't you mind? We'd be running in opposition, in a way, you know," he laughed, "only I wouldn't cut prices—and you could have the first chance."

"Oh, I think it would be splendid," cried Patricia. "Then I wouldn't feel badly about—I mean there'd be nothing to worry about while you're waiting. But how can you get a car?"

Garrison leaned forward and plucked a few blades of grass from the gravelled path at his feet.

"I think," he said, consideringly, "that I know of a car I can get—one I can hire, I mean. They won't charge very much, I imagine, and I ought to be able to run it at a profit."

He glanced at her sidewise and then smiled at the look of happiness on her face.

"Oh, that will be wonderful! It really is great larks, driving a cab. Sometimes it isn't, altogether —but generally it's great fun. You mustn't forget to get a license, you know. You remember the trouble you saved me from," and she laughed joyously.

John Garrison did not tell her that this formality had already been complied with. He only said:

"Yes. I remember. I've been blessing that policeman ever since. If it hadn't been for him——" He did not finish the sentence, but his brown laughing eyes made his meaning quite clear.

Pat blushed a little and glanced away at the purple rampart which bounded the horizon toward the glowing west.

CHAPTER XVIII

THAT same night John Garrison excused himself immediately after dinner. He had to go into town on business, he said, and only Pat and the doctor knew what that business was. He had asked Mrs. Carrington's permission to keep in the garage a car which he was bringing out. She had acceded readily to the request. Owning a car seemed a matter of course to one of the wealth and position of the New York Garrisons, and she suspected nothing of the use to which it would be put.

Garrison had talked the matter over privately with Doctor Stafford, with whom he was on the most cordial terms. The doctor had agreed that it was a practical plan and one which would result in the highest attainable degree of protection for Patricia. He had been somewhat worried of late lest his tacit acceptance of her adventurous proposition might in some way prove to have been injudicious, and he was overjoyed to think that this capable young man had so readily hit upon a solution of the difficulty. Garrison made no secret, to the doctor, that this was his prime consideration, though he also inferred that the money he would thus earn would be welcome in tiding him over his present troubles.

"You think, then, that the rent of the car won't make too deep an inroad on your profits?" the doctor had asked, and Garrison had replied, in almost the same words he had used to Patricia:

"No, I don't think so. I think I know of a car I can get—for very little."

The doctor, having had no experience with the hiring of motor cars, other than taxicabs, was quite satisfied with this. He had every confidence that John Garrison was capable of attending to his own affairs. He would have been quite sure that the self-reliant young man knew what he was about if he had been able, unobserved, to follow him that night when he reached New York and, having left the Grand Central Station behind him, made his way northward, with long, purposeful steps.

Seemingly quite unhurried, for the night was yet young, he walked up Park Avenue for a mile or more and then turned toward the east. After he had crossed the street, his pace slackened and he went slowly and quietly until he reached Lexington Avenue. Here he glanced swiftly up and down the street and then retraced his steps as far as the middle of the block.

The street was very quiet. Only a few pedestrians were in sight and these were hurrying homeward, for the night had fallen dark and the wind was rising with a threat of rain.

Garrison was standing before a low building from which came not the least sign of light or life. The

great doors in the front were protected by a heavy iron grille. He looked again to right and left, made sure that there was no policeman or watchman in sight, and swiftly slipped a key which he held ready in his hand into the lock. It turned without a sound, and in an instant he had passed through the broad door and closed it gently.

He stood perfectly still for a moment, accustoming his eyes to the almost total darkness. What little light there was came through the dusty glass of the doors from a street lamp in front of the next building and fell weirdly upon three large, sheeted, massive shapes. They occupied all of one side of the wide, low, stone-paved room. The one nearest the street was much lower than the others and Garrison stood looking at it for some time, lost in thought. He even raised the canvas cover and ran his hand lovingly over the smooth surface of the wheel of a Cunningham roadster. Then he shook his head sadly and turned to the next car. This proved to be a large touring car, elegant in appointment and exquisitely new and clean.

"Doesn't look the part, at all," he said, disconsolately, and was just on the point of raising the sheet on the last car when a strong, brilliant ray of light pierced the dusty gloom of the glass door and flashed swiftly all about the interior.

Garrison dropped to the floor between the cars as if he had been shot. He looked cautiously out from the deep shadow of the engine and beheld a man's

face dimly outlined against the darkness. The man, evidently a night watchman, was peering into the garage, his investigation aided by the flashlight which he held in his raised hand. Had he seen or heard anything to arouse his suspicions? Garrison could not be sure. He heard the man try the door and thanked his lucky stars that the bolt had shot home when he closed it.

After rattling the knob unnecessarily—it seemed to Garrison's taut nerves—the man, apparently satisfied, passed on.

When his echoing footsteps had quite died away, Garrison rose to his feet and, lifting the canvas on the last car, breathed a sigh of relief.

"A Peerless Eight," he said, after a brief examination, "with a sedan body. Nothing could be better! I want an engine that I can depend on. One that never goes back on friend or foe. Oh, this is a piece of luck, pure and simple."

He chuckled a little to himself as he took the license tag from the front and, creeping to the rear, removed the one on the back. He stood balancing them in his hand for a moment. Then he slipped them under the cushions of the rear seat and, unwrapping a flat package which he had been carrying under his arm ever since he left Stonehill, he produced a new set of license tags and put them in the place of the others. Carefully he folded up the wrapping paper and crammed it in his pocket.

After that he tested the tank and found that it was half full of gasoline.

"The stars in their courses fight for us," he grinned to himself, and having folded up the sheet of canvas and hidden it under that of the roadster, he opened the door a crack and looked out into the street.

The rain was beginning to fall heavily and the street was practically deserted.

"So much the better," he thought, glancing up at the sky. "Weather made for the convenience of John Garrison." He grinned again as he spoke the name.

Softly he closed the door, ran rapidly to the back of the garage and took his place at the wheel of the sedan. With exceeding care to make the least possible noise, he started the engine. It responded with the satisfying surety of a dependable piece of mechanism. He left it running, went back and opened the doors wide, and with perfect skill manœuvred the long car out into the empty street.

Swift as thought he dashed back and closed the doors, tried them to make sure that they were fast, and in another moment was speeding on his way.

Unheeding the spiteful gusts of rain which fell on the closed windshield, he drove northward, through the Park and across the Harlem River. He did not slacken speed until he reached the comparatively open country. Then he slowed down and, as well as he could for the darkness, looked about him.

"It should be about here," he thought, and drove on at a foot pace.

Presently his headlights showed him a turn in the road and, beyond it, a low-lying, marshy field beside which was a muddy cart track. Without hesitation he swung off the paved road, and in a moment the heavy car was labouring through mud and water which splashed up on the hood and running gear. He drove on for a little way, then reversed the engine and backed slowly out of the mud hole.

"No use to tempt Providence," he laughed to himself. "That road is always wet, and with this rain—whew! I'd hate to get stuck. It's all right now, though," he added as the wheels gained firmer ground.

Then John Garrison did a strange thing. He turned up his coat collar and got out into the driving rain. With apparent unconcern he gathered up two handfuls of gritty, wet earth and deliberately rubbed down the shining body of the car and the hood of the engine. When the beautiful surface was sufficiently scratched and marred, he cleansed his hands on the long, wet grass and resumed his seat with a chuckle of glee.

"The rain will wash the dirt off and I'll bet the old girl will seem to have aged five years in a single night," he thought. "Oh, it's a great life, a great life! I've never been so happy—so happy before. It's great larks, as Patty said. Great larks! . . . Patricia. . . . Suits her. Yes, it suits her.

But so does 'Patty.' . . . And 'Pat' . . . that's what the doctor calls her—'Pat,'" trying it over and over again. "I don't know but what 'Pat' suits her best of all."

The car sped smoothly on its appointed way. It flashed through small towns where street lights, each with a nimbus round its head, glimmered in long rows, reflected from wet pavements. Then on again, past high brick walls of great estates and quiet, dark farmhouses shrinking back among their sheltering trees. And at last a height from which, to the left, the eye fell on broad reaches of lamp-bordered emptiness, where the great river, silent and serene, swept southward.

John Garrison (for so, out of politeness, we must still call him, since that is what he called himself) guided the car with ease and surety up the drive of Morgan Carrington's house. Patricia had given him the key to the garage and, having unlocked and swung back the broad doors, he ran his newly acquired but much defaced Peerless in alongside the smaller car.

"They look a little bit like a contented husband and wife," he thought, whimsically, as he closed and locked the doors.

The lower floor of the house, when he let himself in, was brilliantly lighted but quiet and empty. It was nearing midnight and all the household had retired. He was not surprised at the illumination, for Patty had insisted on this precaution, though he had longed

to have the house left dark in the hope that the marauder might return and that he might catch him and "acquire merit" in Patricia's eyes.

He was thinking of those eyes as he fell asleep and found himself murmuring, half aloud:

"Trusty, dusky, vivid, true,
With eyes of gold and bramble dew."

He liked the sound of the words. It did not matter in the least that her eyes were dark brown.

"Steel true and blade straight
The great artificer——"

"Oh God," he whispered, "God, make me worthy, somehow! She's—oh, she's such a—such a corker!"

And with this reverently irreverent prayer on his lips, John Garrison fell asleep in the room which his uncle had designed for Ned Driscoll.

CHAPTER XIX

SO, IN spite of ever-present anxiety the time passed swiftly for Patricia and John Garrison. Every afternoon the two cars ran quietly out from Morgan Carrington's house and disappeared down Broad Road. They always went off before Mrs. Carrington awakened from her afternoon nap, and she never remarked the fact that they were using two cars instead of one.

To a large extent Garrison usurped Marco's place in the Carrington garden, though that hard-working Italian still delved in the doctor's garden and gathered from it the fruits of the earth, to say nothing of the vegetables. It was evident to the doctor that Marco liked the place and was interested in the progress of the plants over which he laboured, for he was often seen smoking his pipe in the evening hours as he loafed up and down the aqueduct path. Stafford had grown quite fond of the genial labourer whose conscientious work, early and late, was something new in his experience of that class. The garden blossomed like the rose, and the long shelves in the cellar were fast filling up with rich-coloured glasses of fruit and squat, square jars of a delectable green.

Every early morning Pat and John Garrison

laboured like Adam and Eve in the first garden, though it seemed to the young man (and, perhaps, to the girl also, though we are too scrupulous to delve deeply into the state of her thoughts) that they had, surely, not yet been excluded from Paradise. The air was fresh and sweet with the new day. The dew sparkled on green plants and vari-coloured flowers, for it was a quaint old place, where the silver-green and mauve of the humble but beautiful cabbage was relieved by the delicate rose and white of spicy old-fashioned pinks, and the rows of peas and beans ended in clumps of phlox and sweet-william.

They worked side by side, Pat in a soft tan shirt, open at the neck, short corduroy skirt, heavy gloves, and a broad gardening hat; John Garrison in the remains of an old uniform. And as they worked, they talked. Their tones were low in deference to the newly awakened day. They seemed to be shut in by the high hedges from all the world and its dust and care, and their talk became more and more personal and intimate, but not once did John Garrison betray himself, though Patricia, with an almost impish ingenuity, endeavoured to trip him up.

The doctor, too, tested him with every wile of his clever, resourceful mind, as they all three worked together, almost every early afternoon, in his pleasant, cool kitchen, preserving or canning, as the generous products of the gardens demanded. They talked intimately, too, in the quiet evening hours while they rested from their labours and the two men smoked

innumerable cigarettes on the doctor's old porch. Sometimes Pat was with them and sometimes not, but never could the old physician find out more than the facts John had presented when he first appeared among them, and the doctor could not but admire the young man's adroitness and his strength of purpose.

"Runs in the family, I imagine," he said one day to Pat, in one of their many private talks on the subject. "Your Uncle Morgan would have put through a situation of this kind in much the same way, though I can't picture his doing it from a pure spirit of romance. Only if anything presented itself to him as desirable or amusing, he'd go through with it to the bitter end, even if he stepped on several toes by the way." He laughed softly, reminiscently. "It isn't exactly to the point, but I remember, when I first came here to live, that he insisted on putting in some new floors in the front part of the old house. I didn't want them at all. I hated all the fuss of having the place torn up for an indefinite period. But do you think my feelings on the subject made any difference to him? Not at all. He said I ought to want smooth floors, that they'd be much easier to clean, that I didn't know what was good for me, and more to the same purpose. We almost came to blows, but the floors went in, as you know."

Patricia laughed a little sadly.

"Poor Uncle Morgan," she said. "He did like his own way, but he was an old dear, in spite of it all.

How I wish—oh, how I wish we could have some news of him!"

As if answer to her longing they did get a bit of information that very afternoon, though it was not much to the purpose, as Patty sorrowfully pointed out.

It had been well over a month since Powell had taken up the case and, though he had reported often and had been out to look the ground over again on several occasions, he had been able to produce no new facts.

On this day, he telephoned in the morning that they had, at last, made a discovery, and appeared in the early afternoon with a triumphant smile on his face.

"It took some sleuthing, I'm here to state," he said, seating himself comfortably in a porch chair and lighting a long cigar. "Can I go on? Is this young man wise?" he questioned, with a motion of his head toward John Garrison. "Yes? O. K. . . . Well, then, we've been trying, among other things, to find out where Mr. Carrington went with all that money immediately after he left the Carstairs Trust Company. Of course, the first thing was to get next to the cabman who picked him up that Monday morning. It wasn't as easy as you might think, because we hadn't a helluva lot to go on. As it happened, we might have found him sooner if he hadn't been laid up with a cold for several weeks."

"Then you did find him?" asked Patricia, impetuously.

"Sure we found him. Ain't I telling you?" said

Powell, complacently. "There wasn't much trouble, once we got the right man. He remembered the old gent well. He belongs to the regular Grand Central cab service, Burke does, and he'd taken Mr. Carrington from that nine-fifty-three train several times before. Once or twice he'd taken him to the Carstairs Trust Company direct, but he hadn't that morning the old gent disappeared. That day they went away down town first of all. He couldn't remember where, exactly, but the starter's record showed that. It was to the Trinity Building on Broadway."

"Franklin Thornton's office," the doctor interrupted.

"Yes. Well, he waited there for a little while and then they came up town again. They picked up the other man, the one you found out about at the Carstairs Trust Company, I suppose it was, Doctor. They picked him up on Broadway, somewhere about Eighth Street. He was waiting at the corner when Mr. Carrington ordered Burke to stop. He noticed particular, Burke did, because the same man had been with the old gent before, at the Grand Central Station."

"Burke was sure that it was the same man?"

"Yes, sir. And I'm certain he was right because that was what Mike, the Carstairs door-man, said."

"Yes, yes. I know. It seems queer. But go on. Where did they go from there?"

"They turned off Broadway at Madison Square and came up the Avenue. Burke says they stopped

once, he thinks, before they went to the bank. He doesn't remember where, but we know that it was at Tiffany's."

"Yes."

"Afterward, after they'd been to the bank, I mean, they stopped at several places. Burke doesn't know just what places they were. It was a long time ago, you know, and he's driving people all the time. You can't expect it of him. It's a wonder he remembers as much as he does, but he's pretty sure that they were all around Fifth Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street and he does remember that they stopped quite a while at Macy's. Mr. Carrington stayed in the cab and the other man got out and went into the store. When he came back he had a lot of packages, big and little. He got into the cab and they went back to the Avenue and down it to Washington Square. There both men got out—and that's the last Burke ever saw of them."

A short silence fell. They were digesting the unpalatable fact that all the detective's labours had only enabled them to follow through a few miles of city streets the man they so anxiously sought, and that his final destination was as much of a mystery as ever.

"Did Burke notice which way they went when they left the cab?" asked Garrison, after a moment's consideration.

"Yes," answered Powell, at once. "They went south through the park."

"Why, there's nothing but artists' quarters and slums in that direction."

The detective nodded wisely.

"And a likely place to inveigle an old man with a pot of money in his clothes into, believe me!" he said. "We may find the thing's worse than I thought at first. I'd like to get my hands on that shabby guy that was with him in the cab, I'll tell the world! I'll lay a thousand cold simoleons to a last year's straw hat, right now, that this same bird could tell us just what happened to Mr. Carrington, and tell it right—if he would—which ain't hardly to be expected," he added, with a disconsolate shake of the head.

"But haven't you found any clues to the man's identity?"

"Nothing but the descriptions we got out of Burke and the man at the bank, and they don't agree on more'n one or two points, really. They both say he wasn't well dressed. Mike thinks he was an old man and Burke is sure he wasn't more than middle-aged. I think Burke knows best, because Mike only saw him when he was sitting down in the cab."

"Didn't Burke hear anything or see anything by which he could judge whether the man and Mr. Carrington were on good terms?" asked Garrison.

"He said he kinda thought they were quarrelling about something. He heard the old gent's voice raised a couple of times, but he couldn't tell what he said, exactly. He was driving a flivver, you know."

Having had some experience with the loud voice of that useful animal, Garrison only said, "Of course," and fell silent again.

"Well, folks, I guess that'll be about all, and I'd better be getting back on me job," said the detective, rising and picking up his hat from the floor beside his chair. "Now, don't you go to worrying, Miss. Things ain't so bad but what they could be worse. Sooner or later, dead or alive, we'll find your uncle for you." And with this cheering promise, he took himself off.

It was all John Garrison and the good little doctor could do to overcome the dark forebodings into which the detective's news had plunged Patricia. They strove strenuously, however, and by evening had achieved a reasonable degree of success.

Nevertheless, when John, having received a thick letter just before dinner, went into town that evening on some unexplained but necessary business, he took with him a heavy heart. He felt that the facts which they had just learned were ominous in the extreme. Pat was taking it like a soldier, but the anxiety was almost more than the girl could bear. She turned to him in her trouble with most satisfying directness, and yet there was something about her attitude—he couldn't tell just what—that puzzled him. Could she suspect—— Well, there was no use worrying about that.

She had been in his thoughts all the evening. They

were still all of her and her Uncle Morgan when he returned to Stonehill, at about half after ten, and made his way on foot up from the station.

The driveway from Broad Road up to the house was of crushed stone and rather rough; so, without thinking much about it, he stepped off to the side and his footsteps fell soundlessly on the thick turf with which the road was bordered.

He had gained the top of the rise and was about to cross over to the house when he saw something which made him draw back quickly into the shadow of the trees.

The faint starlight was dim and uncertain, but he was quite sure that someone was moving stealthily away from the back of the house, across the open space before the garage. The whole lower floor of the house was brilliantly lighted as it had been every night since it was entered and, from the kitchen windows which were nearest him, the light fell a little way out on the ground. But the dark figure was beyond their radiance before he caught sight of it and he could only make out a dim shape which moved swiftly and disappeared in the shrubbery at the corner of the garage. It was still early, but the movements of the unknown visitor were too suspicious to admit of an innocent interpretation.

Without an instant's hesitation, Garrison set off in pursuit. He kept in the deep shadow, running swiftly and quietly until he reached the garage. Then, on hands and knees, he crept through the

bushes, up alongside the garden, toward the aqueduct. Thick, low branches impeded his progress. Briers caught at his clothes and he had to stop, panting, to release himself. But, at last, he gained a more open space outside the garden hedge and paused under cover of its shadow to look about him.

Just above was the steep, grassy slope of the aqueduct embankment. He could hear no movement—not the faintest sound of life, though he listened with straining ears. Waiting but a fraction of a second to make sure, he crept upward toward the well-trodden path.

Toward the north it vanished almost at once into the shadow of tall trees. This would be the obvious direction in which to make a getaway, he thought, and was about to leap forward when—he could not tell whether it was some slight sound or only instinct that made him look toward the south. The path, clear of the trees for a space, ran past the doctor's house. He could just make it out, a faint gray track, scarcely discernible in the dim light, but beyond the house, where it passed again among the trees, he was quite sure he saw someone moving quickly. The figure was gone instantly, and John started in hot pursuit.

A wild sprint across the open, a mad dash into the dark shadow. His body collided sharply with something which turned and clutched and struggled. Together they rolled upon the grass. A hot, panting breath fanned John's cheek and he was aware of

an unpleasant smell which, in the turmoil of his senses, he could not quite place.

The struggle was fierce but short lived. Garrison was more than a match for his antagonist and, in a breathless moment, had him at his mercy. Kneeling on the prostrate form, with his hand on the other's throat, he spoke:

"I've got you. Damn you. I'll teach you to frighten innocent people! What do you mean——"

"Why, Mista Garrison! It's Mista Garrison! I thoughta you was crook—what you calla footpad, yes."

"Marco!" cried John Garrison, letting go his hold and slipping off into the grass. "Well, I'll be darned!"

"Yes, Mista Garrison. Yes, sir. So will I! Why you jump on Marco in dark? You no crook! Marco come out for little walk—smoke pipe. T'ink it get late, yes. Marco start 'long home. Nice young gent jump on Marco from behine. I t'ink dat funny, me. Yes."

"I'm awfully sorry, Marco. Hope I didn't hurt you. I was barking up the wrong tree, damn it, and the man I wanted has given me the slip and got clean off."

"Oth' man?" said Marco, quickly. "What oth' man?"

"I don't know who he was," answered Garrison, disgustedly. "I'd give a pretty penny if I did. Somebody was skulking around Miss Carrington's

back door and I chased him up through the shrubbery. I only caught a glimpse of him once. He must have jumped into the trees on the aqueduct up there, and he's far enough off by this time."

"An' you thought me was him?" laughed Marco. "Some joke on you, Mista Garrison. Yes?"

"Oh, I've made an ass of myself. You needn't rub it in, Marco," said John, with a short laugh of disappointment.

"Don' you worry, Mista Garrison. Marco won' let on to Missa Pat—'bout 'ass,' you know."

"No. Don't. I'll tell Doctor Stafford, myself."

And upon receiving Marco's assurance that he wasn't hurt and that he bore no ill-will, the two men parted.

John Garrison was just putting out his light before turning in for the night when he stopped with his hand on the switch.

"Garlic," he said, aloud. "It was garlic I smelled, of course. . . . Nothing strange in that. Marco's a dago of dagoes. . . . Only—he came out to smoke a pipe, he said. But he hadn't been smoking—not for some time, anyway. The rank tobacco those men use . . . Hm-m-m . . . I wonder." . . .

Turning off the light, John got into bed with the uneasy feeling that there were other shadows than those of the dark night which whispered around the house, and that they strove, unavailingly, to convey some hint to his perturbed and muddled senses.

CHAPTER XX

NO, JOHN. As I said when you told me about it this morning," remarked Doctor Stafford, slowly, "I can't, for the life of me, believe that Marco could be mixed up with an ugly crime."

The two men had just finished luncheon in the doctor's living room and were discussing again, over their cigarettes, Garrison's adventure of the night before.

"It does look different in the cold morning light," the young man admitted, "but I can't help going back to that 'Black Hand' thing. It seems to smell of garlic, to me, as I can swear Marco's breath did last night, in spite of all his talk about a pipe."

"I know," said the doctor, meditatively. "One would think so, at the first blush. But the words which were used somehow don't fit in with a foreigner. At least, they seem unnatural to me. 'Watch out,' it said. 'Your time is come.' Now, can you imagine Marco saying, 'Watch out'?"

John shook his head slowly.

"Pat uses that expression," the doctor continued. "I think most Southerners—even the darkies—use it. You'll hear Lily say it often enough, if you listen. Here she comes now," he broke off, rising. "She's

going to help me with the string beans this afternoon until you and Pat get back. Short day for the working classes, Saturday, but not for us," he laughed, as he went out into the kitchen.

Garrison followed him after a moment. Lily was busily stringing beans while the doctor prepared the sterilizer for the cans. The woman was humming a lugubrious tune.

"Hello, Lily. How's every little thing?" said John, pleasantly.

"Aw, Mist' Garrison, nothin' but trouble. Nothin' but trouble fer dis yere gal. Efn hit ain't one thing hit's t'other, twell ah mos' wisht ah was daid en gone t' glory!"

"Why, what's the matter now, Lily? Come across! What's your trouble? Tell the doctor. Maybe he can help you."

"Ain't no docter in dis worl' kin he'p me," said Lily, mournfully. "Fus ah's hanted wid a black cat. Dat means de wors' ob trouble. An' den dat boy, Sam! Oh, well, nebber mine. Sam ain't de onliest nigger dey is, ah'll tell de worl'!"

"What's Sam been doing, Lily? He's a gay young blade! What's he been doing now?"

" 'Tain't so much what he's doin' now ez what he has been doin'. Ah'll watch out fer him en mek him toe de mark now, lemme tell yer."

"What has he been doing, then?" Garrison was heartily amused by the coloured woman's conversation and could not forbear to draw her out.

She glanced, with a slightly injured air, at John's smiling face and turned away from him. "You know sumpin', Docter," she said, raising her voice a little. "Dat Lize Jane what does de laun'ry—you know what she says? She axes is ah ma'ied to Sam. Ah says, sho ah is. An' she ups an 'spon's, says she, 'Whyn't yer got yo' ma'iage cercifficate frame' en hangin' up in de kitchen?' she say. 'Gwan, nigger,' ah says, right back quick, ah says, 'hit ain't done no mo'. Where was yo' raise', gal? Did yer eber see quality white folkses have deir cercifficates frame' en hangin' up in de parlour?'"

Both men laughed heartily.

"Good for you, Lily. That's what we call the retort courteous, and then some! You got the best of her that time, certainly."

"But dat ain't all dat fool gal done tole me. She say Sam's 'ceivin' me, dat he was ma'ied two years ago. Ef dat's so, en ah fine hit out, ah'll comb his wool fer him. You leave hit to me!"

"Here comes Miss Patty," said Garrison from beside the window. "I must be off. Thanks for a bully lunch, Doctor. Be back soon. Good-bye, Lily. Have some of that good old corn pone of yours for dinner, do."

He was still laughing at Lily's social knowledge and her quick repartee when he joined Patricia. He amused her by recounting it as they went down to the garage.

It was only a little after one, but the day was

Saturday and people came home early from the city at this season of the year. It was a wonderful summer day and they had planned to take a holiday after the rush was over.

"We'll meet the two-thirty-nine and that's all," he insisted, as they stood together beside their cars, listening to the whistle of the approaching train. "After that, we'll put your car in the garage and go for a long drive. The doctor says he doesn't need us, and you promised, you know."

"Oh, I'll do what I said," laughed Patricia. "I'm as sick of the road up from the station as you can possibly be. I'm just crazy to get clear away from things. Mr. Turnbull will be on the two-thirty-nine. He said so this morning. I've got to meet him. I missed once, the morning after the robbery, if you can call it that, up at the house, you know. He was pretty angry and I promised it never should happen again. And it won't," she added, decidedly, with a chop of her determined little chin.

The train rolled in and both of them were busy for the next hour. The two luxurious cars were in great demand. Even the old dowagers had come to trust Pat's skillful driving, and Garrison had been a success from the first. There was something in his upright bearing which suggested the returned soldier, and he was all the more popular on that account.

The two young adventurers had scarcely time to speak to each other again until just as the two-thirty-nine came in.

"This is the very last, remember," Garrison said, hastily. "Wait for me in the garage if I'm late. I'll try not to be," and he looked happily into her eyes.

"All aboard, little Miss Chauffeur."

Mr. William Turnbull, the first man off the train, had come up behind them unperceived. He touched Patricia playfully on the shoulder.

"Come into my cabbie, red robin. Partake of my sweet, humble fare," he hummed, jovially.

John Garrison frowned. Patricia looked at the older man quickly.

"Just a moment, if you please, Mr. Turnbull," Garrison said, and drew Patty a little aside.

"The man's been drinking," he said, disgustedly. "I'm going to take him with me. He's not fit——"

"Oh, he's harmless," said Patricia, hurriedly. "He's often like that. I'll be absolutely safe. It would only make a scene if you tried to get him out of the car and I couldn't bear that. You can see that he's perfectly all right."

Turnbull was already in Pat's car. He had started the engine with assured touch and now turned to beckon to her. His face was not more flushed than usual and he was behaving in a sober, rational manner.

"It's quite all right, John, and I really can't afford to antagonize him. He's my best customer.—Just a second, Mr. Turnbull," and Pat darted over to the car.

Garrison watched her with a very delicious whirl-

ing sensation in his head. He could feel the touch of her hand on his—and she had never called him "John" before. The doctor had done so for some time but this was the first . . .

Patricia had taken her place beside Mr.Turnbull and the car sped up the hill. He glanced sidewise at her several times as they made their way through the village, and his eyes were filled with a somewhat satirical humour, but he maintained, for him, an unusual silence until they had reached the second hill, where the houses were few and scattered.

"Well, how's business, girlie?" His speech was faintly, almost imperceptibly, blurred. "You're making quite a good thing of it, eh?"

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Turnbull." Patricia spoke a trifle stiffly.

"But it isn't the money you're after, is it? It's just for sport. Eh, what?"

"Why, no. Of course not. I don't know why you should think I'd be doing it for fun," said Patricia, rather indignantly.

"Oh, come off. Don't try any of that on me. Why should Morgan Carrington's niece be driving a taxi if it wasn't for a lark?"

Pat started.

"What do you mean?" she asked, turning upon him. "What makes you think——"

"Now, little girlie, take it easy. Take it easy. I don't think, I know. But don't you be worried. I'm not a spoil-sport."

Patricia was silent. The man grinned, glancing at her flushed face.

"Did you think you two could drive good-looking private cars as taxis and no one ask any questions about who you were? I knew him the minute I laid eyes on him. Seen him before, in New York. But you had me guessing for awhile. I got so darned interested that I had Jim O'Rourke follow you home a couple of times in his taxi. He was some curious himself, seeing that you were getting all the cream of the business. So, now that I know that much, come across with the rest. What's your little game?"

Patricia had been staring at him in consternation. If her identity became generally known, sooner or later her mother would hear of it—even though she saw almost nobody—and then . . . Oh, there would be a row. Pausing to consider how she could best answer him, she turned her head and glanced about, as if for inspiration. With a slight shock, she realized that she was looking at an entirely unfamiliar landscape.

"Why, Mr. Turnbull," she cried, startled, "you've passed your street. You're on the wrong road."

He grinned at her again.

"Not any. Not at all. 'I'm on the right road, sister, but I'm goin' de wrong way,'" he quoted from a popular song. "You and I are going for a little drive together. I'll pay regular rates, so you should worry. It's a nice afternoon and a good time will be had by all."

Patricia looked at him with a frown and her small jaw set.

"Now, don't be cross, girlie. I've been looking forward to this all the week. I found out who you were last Tuesday, but I kept it to myself, and I even paid Jim O'Rourke not to talk. Come now, that was pretty decent of me, wasn't it?"

"I—I suppose it was," said Patricia, somewhat grudgingly, "and I'm grateful to you for that, at least."

"Oh, that's all right, little girl. You'll find I'm a real sport. Even Hilda doesn't know. I wouldn't spring it on you when she was with us. That's why I waited till Saturday. And besides——"

"Mr. Turnbull," said Pat, firmly, "I appreciate your not having told anybody. It was good of you, I suppose. But I must insist that you take me home now. I have an engagement."

"Oh, you have, have you? It's with that smart young chap who calls himself John Garrison, I'll bet!" His tone had lost all of its geniality. "Well, you won't keep it, girlie. You can bet on that. You're going for a ride with Bill Turnbull and you're going to tell him all kinds of interesting things. You're going to tell him all about your little game, yours and John Garrison's." He spoke the name with a sneer. "What's a nice little chicken like you, just out of the shell, doing skylarking around in a taxi while Mr. Carrington's away? While the

cat's away the mice will play, eh, what?" And he laughed, boisterously.

"It isn't any concern of yours, Mr. Turnbull," said Pat, firmly, "and I'm really not going to tell you anything about it. It's of no possible interest to you, and I must insist that you drive at once to your house and let me take the car home."

"Well, girlie," said Turnbull, easily, "I'm not going to, and that's flat. I promised myself that I'd have some fun with you this afternoon and I'm going to—so don't let's talk about it any more. We'll go up to Briarcliff and have tea and I'll give you a helluva good time. Now, be a good little sport," and he reached over and patted her on the far shoulder in none too fatherly a manner.

Patricia flushed furiously and looked anxiously about her. They were on a narrow road which wound its way upward through thick trees along the high ridge east of the Hudson. Not a house was in sight. The road was unfrequented and turned and twisted about to ease the grade, so that she could not see far ahead. Suddenly, as they turned a sharp bend, she saw, a little way in front, a large frame house standing in a clearing. She had no definite plan except to rid herself of her tormentor. She felt that she could not stand his leering, admiring eyes another moment. As they neared the road up to the house, she reached over, caught the wheel

in her left hand and gave it a sharp twist. The car swerved violently to the right.

With a muttered oath, Turnbull grasped her wrist and tore her hand from the wheel. At the same instant he swung the car back to the road.

"You cute little devil," he cried, half laughing, half angry. "You keep your hand off the wheel. Naughty, naughty!" admonishing with playful finger. "You might upset nice little car, and then where'd the taxi business be? You can trust Billy Turnbull. He can drive with one hand and keep you in order with the other, if necessary. Like this—see?"

He grasped the steering wheel firmly with his left hand and, suddenly reaching over, caught both her hands, which were clenched together, in his right. She struggled fiercely, but he held them in a crushing grip. Not taking his eyes from the road, he guided the car skillfully around the next turn.

Honk! Honk!

A car was coming up behind them.

HONK! HONK!

It had passed the bend and was coming swiftly toward them. Pat glanced behind and her heart gave a little suffocating thrill of joy. John Garrison was at the wheel.

H-O-N-K—H-O-N-K-K-K! The car called insistently for a clear road. It was coming so fast that the steady, rhythmic beat of the engine, like that of a strong and faithful heart, was almost drowned by the roar of the double jet of gas.

Patricia's car was not provided with a mirror and Turnbull was too much occupied to turn his head. He could hear that the motor behind him was not slackening speed and, perforce, he drew out of the road.

The big Peerless swept by, ran ahead about four hundred feet and then was turned abruptly to the right, the engine was reversed and the car backed, completely blocking the narrow road.

With the swiftness of thought, Turnbull slammed on the brakes and brought the little Orcutt to a standstill just in time to avoid a collision. His face was white with fear and anger.

"What the hell do you think you're doing, you—you——" Words choked him.

Garrison leaped from his seat and, stepping over to the door of Patricia's car, jerked it open.

"I'm going to have the pleasure of taking you home, Mr. Turnbull," he said, in a controlled voice.

"The hell you are!" shouted Turnbull, thoroughly exasperated.

John's eyes narrowed. He poised himself lightly on the balls of his feet and clenched his hands. His face was within a few inches of Turnbull's.

"Get into my car," he said, quietly, through shut teeth.

Turnbull wavered. John's eyes held him fast.

"*Get—into—my—car*," he said again.

The words were so fraught with deadly purpose that Turnbull was cowed as only a born bully can be cowed.

"Oh, well," he said, shifting uneasily, "since you're so pressing. Anything to avoid a row before a lady."

He was too abject even to glance at Patricia as he slowly descended and took his place in the tonneau of John's car.

"Are you all right, Pat?"

Garrison leaned forward and laid his hand gently over hers. Their eyes met. What she saw in his made her dizzy for a second.

"Yes," she said, in a very small voice. "Yes, John. I'm quite all right."

"Do you feel that you can drive back by yourself?" he asked, for her hand was trembling under his.

"Yes. Oh, yes, John." She managed a smile which, though a little shaky, was still reassuring.

"All right," he said, drawing himself up but not taking his eyes from hers. "Let me pass you and then follow on. I'll drive slowly."

He stood looking at her for another moment, then went back to his reluctant passenger.

CHAPTER XXI

WITH beating heart, Pat followed the big car—followed on at John's bidding. She felt, suddenly, with a sure, safe, joyous sense, that she would be willing—glad—to follow the bidding of this strong, chivalrous personality wherever it might lead. She had no doubt, now, of her feeling—nor of his. She was young and innocent, but not ignorant, and her experience in the South, where men love swiftly and are bold to declare their passions, left her no doubt as to the truth of the emotion she had read in his eyes.

"He loves me. He loves me. He loves me," her heart sang.

All the shining world swam in a shimmering haze in which she saw nothing clearly save the dark head through the glass of the car in front. Saw it turn, every now and then. Knew that John was watching to see that she was safe.

He waved his hand to her as he turned off on Rosemary Road and she responded with a joyful little gesture of her hand to the brim of her hat. He returned her salute with a happy laugh and Pat drove swiftly home.

"If I hurry, I'll have time to change into something more—more—something a little more de-

cent," she thought with an innocent touch of coquetry as she ran into the house.

Dashing past the table in the hall, her eye caught sight of a bulky envelope addressed to herself in a tall, fashionable boarding-school sort of hand.

"Why—why, that's from Alicia Ambers," she cried, "and I haven't heard from her in—oh, ever so long."

She caught up the letter and ran on up the stairs to her own room, laid it on the dressing table, and began, with hasty fingers, to take off her coat.

"Wonder what she says, dear old Alicia," she thought, pulling the pins from her hair. "Wish I had time to read it. But I mustn't keep John waiting. I'll just glance at it when I've done my hair to see if she has any thrilling news. Wouldn't be surprised a bit if she's engaged, the dear thing."

Her hands were busy for a moment with brush and comb. When she had put the finishing touch to her simple, graceful coiffure, she looked at herself in the glass with a new interest.

"I'm glad you're pretty," she whispered to her radiant reflection. "You can't be too pretty to suit me." Then, with a little blush, she took up the letter, tore open the envelope and pulled out the enclosure.

As she did so, a slip of thick, blank paper fell to the floor. She stooped, recovered it, turned it over, and gave a little gasp of surprise.

Laughing up at her from a jumbled background

of sand bags were the eyes whose message she had read with racing heart only a little while before. It was a snapshot photograph and showed John Garrison in khaki, his helmet tilted slightly above his laughing face. It was thus he had faced death, she thought, with laughter on his face and courage in his heart, and her eyes filled with sudden tears.

"I *must* find out how Alicia got it," flashed through her mind, and swiftly she ran through the letter. . . . Ran through it—and then, with a face from which all the bright colour had fled, she read it again, slowly, with sinking heart:

DEAREST, DARLING OLD PAT:

I've been crazy to write to you for a long time, but I've been so busy. I have stacks of letters from the old girls at school that I haven't answered yet and I know that Virginia is furious, but you aren't, are you, old dear?

You won't be, anyway, I know, when I tell you—oh, such a thrilling thing. I've been writing for months to your cousin, Ned Driscoll, in France! Yes, I have. Isn't it too entertaining? My brother, Tom, whose picture you used to admire in school, you remember, wrote me a lot about his "buddie" without happening to mention his name, and when he told me his buddie was laid up in the hospital and asked me to write to cheer him up, I began to enclose notes in my letters to Tom. I just started them, "Dear Buddie," and he signed his answers, "Ned." So you see I didn't guess who he really was for quite a long time. Then, you know, our letters began to be—well, pretty friendly—and he asked me to send his direct—not enclosed to Tom, and I found out his full name.

Oh, Pat, he's a dear, he really is. It's a perfect shame you haven't ever seen him. I remember I thought it so sort of jolly and romantic, in school, that you had that rich New York cousin you'd never laid eyes on. Well, here he is, dearest. I'm sending

him to you for one look, but you must send him right back to me. I wouldn't lose that picture for all the world, and I know you'll think I'm right generous to let you have it, even for a little while.

Oh, Pat, darling, I'm so happy. I don't believe I could know him better than I do from his adorable letters and he—well, he says the same of me—only he says it in the prettiest way imaginable. I sent him my photograph a few weeks ago. It was a good one, but I don't think it flatters me. I couldn't bear to have him disappointed in me when he comes home. And that will be soon, now, I hope—oh, I hope it will be soon! I haven't heard from him for a long time, the mails are so uncertain, but the last letter said he might be ordered home almost any day. He'd just received my photograph and he said—oh, Pat, dearest, I can't tell even you what he said, but it was—well—very satisfactory to this child.

Pat, dear, when he comes and we've really seen each other and all that—oh, Pat, if it turns out as we both hope, will you be my maid of honour, dear? I want you more than anybody. It's not so terribly far to come. The Eastern Shore is easy to reach now, and your mother surely will let you come when she knows how much I want you, won't she?

Good-night, dear little Pat. I'll write you again later and keep you informed. Oh, I'm so happy. I wish everybody in the world was as happy as I am. Don't forget to send the photograph *right* back. It's the only one I have—so you know I love you.

Yours always and always,
ALICIA.

Pat dropped her head upon her arms. She did not cry. She was almost too stunned to think. It had seemed only a romantic lark, Ned Driscoll's masquerading as John Garrison, and she had pictured to herself, over and over again, how amusing it would be to tell him, at last, that she had guessed it from the beginning. Why had he done it? Oh,

why, why had he made love to dear little Alicia by letter—and then——

She almost wished, now, that she had overcome her instinct and training and had read the rest of the letter which she had found in her uncle Morgan's pocket. Had he been so anxious to see her settled in life that he had insisted—perhaps threatened to disinherit Ned if he refused—refused to marry her, Patricia Carrington? She raised her head proudly and caught her own disdainful eyes in the glass. Suddenly they brimmed over.

"Oh, I can't bear it," she whispered, catching her lower lip between her even white teeth. "But I won't cry. I won't cry." She clenched her hands till they ached. "If there only could be some mistake." She brushed the tears from her eyes and looked again at the photograph. "But there isn't. It's John—or Ned, I should say. There's no possibility . . . He couldn't have sent a portrait of someone else to Alicia, unless he really is an awful cad. But then he is, of course. No, he isn't. Oh, I can't think. . . . Yes, of course he is. . . . Oh, dear! How—how am I going to bear it?"

There was a soft tapping at the door.

"Pat, Pat, are you ready?" The voice was low, vibrating.

"Oh," the girl moaned below her breath, "he does love me. He does love me now. Oh, Alicia!"

"Pat," the voice called again, softly, tenderly, "are you there?"

Drawn almost against her will, she crossed the floor.

"Yes." She spoke with a calmness which surprised herself. "What is it?"

"Aren't you almost ready? I can't wait. There's something I must tell you, Pat."

She closed her eyes in intolerable pain.

"I can't—I can't go out with you. Not this afternoon. I'm—I'm not feeling well. I——"

"You aren't ill, are you? Oh, Pat!" There were disappointment and anxiety in the tone.

"No," she faltered. "I'm not ill, exactly—but I'm awfully upset. Please, please go away."

"Open the door, Pat. Let me see you just for a moment," he pleaded.

"I can't. I'm not dressed. Oh, please go away now. Give me a little time."

He said something more, some words of pity and concern. She was too distraught to know just what they were. She only caught the words "That damned brute!" as he turned away and went softly down the stairs.

CHAPTER XXII

IT WAS a very pale and silent little Patricia who took her Uncle Morgan's place at the dinner table that night. Doctor Stafford, who was dining with them, glanced at her often with concern and John Garrison scarcely took his eyes from her face. She avoided them as much as possible and when they all left the table and went into the living room, she slipped her hand through the doctor's arm, drew him over to a small sofa, and made him sit beside her, thus eluding a possible tête-à-tête with John.

They chose the living room rather than the porch, for the bright promise of the afternoon had been broken at sunset by heavy clouds rolling in from the east, and the night had fallen dark, with a light, intermittent drizzle of rain. It was damp out there, too damp for her, Mrs. Carrington had said. Doctor Stafford was forced, out of politeness, to remain with her, and Pat had no inclination to do otherwise.

Garrison wandered restlessly about the room for a little while, cast many a longing glance at Patricia which she appeared not to observe and, at last, rather abruptly excused himself and went upstairs.

"What's the matter, Pat, little comrade?" asked the doctor, softly, as soon as he saw Mrs. Carrington

begin to nod over her sewing. She thought the old physician very prosy and his soothing, quiet voice always made her drowsy.

"Oh, dear Doctor S. O. S.," whispered Pat, putting her small, cold hand in his as it lay between them on the sofa, "I'm so—so terribly unhappy. I want to tell you—to ask your advice. Somehow, it always seems natural to turn to you. . . . But I daren't do it now." She motioned toward her mother.

The doctor nodded.

"Come out on the porch. It really isn't very wet," he said. "I'll get you a wrap."

Pat was just following him into the hall when, from the kitchen, they heard Sam's voice raised in terror:

"Don't let her in! Lily, gal! Oh-h-h-h!"

A wild medley of African voices sounded through the quiet house and Lily, her kinky hair on end, dashed wildly through the dining room.

"Yere she is, Miss Patty! Yere she is!" she cried. "She say she comin' 'roun' to tell you-all! Cotch her! Don't let her go!" and she leaped forward and pounced upon the porch light switch.

Instantly the porch was flooded with light and below it, at the foot of the steps, could be seen two ridiculous figures. Sam, in the close embrace of a husky coloured woman, was dancing about as if the gravel were hot. In her endeavour to enter the house and his fervent desire to prevent her, they

turned slowly about and about, as in a grotesque waltz. She was a match for any man in strength and Sam, casting a despairing glance at the startled faces in the doorway, gave up suddenly and simply melted away in the drizzling darkness.

Lily was out of the house in a flash. She jumped down the steps and caught the other woman by the wrist.

"Come in yere, come in yere, gal, en say what you's got to say 'fore dese white folkses. Dey'll teach yer to come projeckin' 'roun' de house en devilin' me de way yer been doin'!"

The woman muttered something and came ponderously up the steps.

"What is it, Lily? What is all this trouble and noise about?" asked the doctor, severely, though he could not help smiling inwardly at the whole absurd situation.

"Yes, Lily. What is it? Answer the doctor at once," said Patricia.

"Dis yere woman," began Lily, wagging an accusing black forefinger. "Yo' tell de docter yer name, gal, en tell hit straight," she admonished.

"Yes. Who are you and what are you doing here, making all this disturbance in a peaceful house?" asked the doctor.

"My name's Violet Price," said the woman, truculently.

"'Tain't, nuther," broke in Lily, angrily. "Dat's Sam's name, Price is, en' yo' ain't——"

"Ah's Sam's lawful wedded wife, ah is," interrupted the woman, fiercely, "en' dis yere yaller gal knows hit. She's livin' in sin, she is!"

"Ain't, nuther!" cried Lily, indignantly. "Ah ask Sam, pintedly, is any woman on dis yearth got a license fer him en he say, 'No!'" and she put her arms akimbo and stared at the other woman triumphantly.

"If Sam's married, Lily didn't know it, I'm sure," said Doctor Stafford, sternly. "You'll have to take my word for that."

The woman was abashed for a moment. She had not counted on quite so many people. In addition to Patricia and the doctor, Mrs. Carrington had come out into the hall, though she kept in the background, and John Garrison, hearing the noise, had run part way down the stairs. When he saw the nature of the dispute, he stopped and viewed the scene from his place of vantage.

Violet Price glanced about at the dominant white faces and then turned again to the one of her own colour.

"Ah'm goin' to tek yer into de cote, gal, yo' an' Sam. Ah done mek up my mine." Her voice rose to a scream. "Efn yo's ma'ied to Sam, yer got to come an' show yer cercifficate in de cote!"

Mrs. Carrington stepped quickly forward, her light-blue eyes blazing. "Don't raise your voice in my house," she said, imperiously, and before the little lady's glance the huge dark woman shrank.

"Yas'm, ah'll be quiet," she said, subsiding like a pricked bubble. "Ah don't mean no harm."

"Don't mean no harm!" cried Lily. "Jus' listen at dat gal. Ain't she been prowlin' 'roun' de house an' devilin' Sam an' me fer weeks? I didn't see her twell las' night when she come peekin' in de kitchen winder."

The doctor turned and glanced swiftly at John, who cleared the lower stairs at a bound.

"If you saw her, Lily, why didn't you call out?" asked Garrison, with a thrill of excitement in his voice.

"Sam clap he han' over my mouth en grab me. He say not to go out, dat hit were a hant. But he can't fool me dataway. Ah thought 'twere a hant, myse'f, at first, 'count o' dat black cat, but hants ain't wearin' hats wid long red oswich plumes wrop 'roun' 'em, lak dat"—she pointed derisively at the other woman's headgear— "an' dey don't stick no warnin's under de do'!"

"What's that? What did you say?" A great light seemed to break upon the little doctor. He turned swiftly and caught hold of the shrinking Violet's fat arm. "Have *you* been sending 'Black Hand' warnings to Lily and Sam?" he cried, breathlessly. "Did you pin the first one on the door back there, thinking it was the kitchen door?"

The woman shook her head in speechless, terrified denial.

"Yas, she did. Ah'm sure she did, Docter. Did y'-all fine one? Dey done got a ugly black face, wid roun' eyes en teef, en two black sticks behine; en dey done got a black han' at de bottom, an' dey say, 'Watch out! Yer havin' a good time now! But wait, yer time is camin'!' en all sech ez dat!" Lily looked quickly at the faces of Miss Patty and the doctor and Mr. Garrison who now stood, drawn close together by the revelation which even the preoccupied Lily could see had somehow startled them all.

"Then it wasn't meant—it wasn't meant for Uncle Morgan!" whispered Pat, staring into the doctor's eyes.

"No." Stafford shook his head. "Wait a little. We must get rid——" He turned back to Violet Price and his face was as stern as that of a hanging judge. "You're going to tell me where you're working now and you're going to leave Sam and Lily alone from this time on, understand. If you're married to Sam, she doesn't know it and it's you who will have to bring proof. Now, where are you working?"

"Ah ain't goin' to tell," said Violet, sullenly.

"Then I'll be obliged to have you arrested," said the doctor, in a deep, fateful voice. "Will you be so good as to call the police station, John?"

"Oh, no, Docter. No!" cried Lily, with the instinct of one darky to help another. "Don't 'res' de po' gal. She don't mean no harm. Yo' tell de docter yer 'dress, gal. He won't mek no mo'

trouble fer yer, lessen yer disbehaves y'se'f."

"Ah lives wid Mis' Rouncewell up to Dorrs Ferry," Violet muttered, completely unnerved by the doctor's threat.

"Would you mind looking that up and verifying it by telephone, John? I want to make sure."

"Oh, don't call up Mis' Rouncewell, please," moaned Violet; "she'll fiah me, sho!"

"He'll only ask if you work there. He won't say anything more," said the doctor.

John had already departed on his errand.

"I won't trouble Sam no mo', Docter. Hones' I won't. I promus! Efn Sam'll pay me de ten dollars en twenty cense he been owin' me fer ober a year, I'll leave him in peace, yas, suh!"

"Then you aren't really married to Sam," said the doctor, severely.

The woman hung her head.

"Er—no sah, but dat fool niggah an' me wuz —well y'all might call it engage', sah," she said, bashfully.

"An' yer ain't got no license fer him, is yer?" asked Lily, eagerly.

"Naw, ah ain't got no license fer him, gal. 'N' yer kin have him, efn y'll pay me de ten-twenty."

"Cheap at the price," exclaimed John. He had just returned and nodded to the doctor and Patricia to signify that the woman really did work for Mrs. Rouncewell. "Now, you make out a receipt, if you please, Doctor Stafford, and state that Violet—what

was your name before you took Sam's?—Oh, Violet Nipple"—he suppressed an almost uncontrollable chuckle—"that Violet Nipple," he continued, "hereby renounces and abjures all lien, claim, right, pretension, or privilege, whether matrimonial or financial, *in re* the person or estate of him who is hereinbefore and after designated as Samuel Price.—Have you got that, Doctor?—Now, you sign that, Violet Nipple. Here's your money—and," he added, solemnly, raising his right hand heavenward, "if you trouble any of these people again—the Lord have mercy on your soul!"

CHAPTER XXIII

IN SPITE of all the excitement of the night before, Doctor Stafford rose at his usual hour on the following morning. Early as it was, he had barely finished his breakfast when Pat appeared, a dark, slender silhouette, in the doorway.

"Good morning, Pat," he called out, rising hastily to greet her. "How's my little comrade this morning? H-m-m-m. Not feeling quite up to the mark, are you? Now, look here, little girl, you mustn't get knocked out. You know everybody depends on you. And, after all, I think we must consider it good news that the 'Black Hand' missive was really sent by a black hand and wasn't intended for Morgan." He laughed, unrestrainedly. "Wasn't it a funny picture—Sam and Violet waltzing around together at the foot of the steps? I'll never forget it, never!"

Pat smiled in response, though a trifle wanly.

"It was funny, Doctor S. O. S., and I am as relieved as you are to get to the bottom of the 'Black Hand' part of the mystery—only——"

The doctor's laugh died suddenly.

"Only it doesn't explain why Morgan went away —or a lot of other things—does it? Is that what

you're troubled about still?—or is it something else?—something new? You started to tell me something last night, dear. What was it? Can an old fellow who—who is very fond of you—can he help in any way? You know I would do anything——"

"Oh, Doctor S. O. S.," cried Pat, tears starting to her eyes, "I don't see how even you can help. But I must tell someone—someone I can trust."

She held out her hand and the doctor took it in his slender, strong fingers. They were still standing in the doorway. He motioned toward the settle at the end of the porch. "Come over and sit down and tell me all about it, Pat," he said.

"No, no, Doctor S. O. S., not out here," she cried, softly. "He might come over."

"He? You mean John?"

The girl nodded.

"Ah-h-h. I thought it might be. Come inside, then, Pat, and we'll close the front door—so. Now"—when they were seated close together on the long couch which was in the corner, out of sight from the window—"let's get at the bottom of the trouble, little girl. If I can help——"

"No one can help, I'm afraid," said Patricia, despairingly. "But, oh, Doctor S. O. S., look at this picture and tell me who it is," and she drew from her pocket the snapshot which Alicia Ambers had sent her.

"Why, it's John, of course," said the doctor, in surprise, "and a very good likeness, too. Where did it come from?"

Then Pat told him the substance of Alicia's letter. The old physician studied her face gravely, soberly. When she had finished he said, slowly:

"It—you won't think I'm presuming on our friendship, will you, my dear? It means a lot to you, I can't help seeing that. . . . And I was sure—yes, I still am sure that—to speak very plainly, Pat—that John—or should I say Ned?—loves you—loves you beyond anything in the world. . . . A man never looks at any other woman in his life as he looked at you last night—of that I am certain. . . . Whatever this may mean——" He glanced again at the photograph.

"But Alicia, Doctor S. O. S.," moaned Pat. "She's the dearest, finest girl. She wouldn't have misunderstood. There's nothing silly about her. He must have made it perfectly plain that he loved her—even though he's never seen her—and . . . Oh, how could he! He doesn't—oh, he doesn't seem that sort of man, does he, Doctor S. O. S.?"

The doctor shook his head.

"No, my dear," he answered, firmly. "I should have said that he knew his own mind as well as any man I had ever met, and that, in spite of his masquerade, he was perfectly scrupulous—and yet——"

"And yet what, Doctor S. O. S.?" She clasped her hands together in an agony of distress.

The doctor hesitated a moment, frowning and tugging at his short white moustache.

"Pat," he said, seriously, "I've unearthed a little

puzzle of my own about John—Ned—whatever his his name really is. I'm ashamed to say that I have more than my share of an old man's curiosity. . . . I didn't say anything to you. I thought I'd let him clear it up himself . . . and I only had an answer yesterday."

"Oh, Doctor S. O. S., what are you talking about?" The suspense was almost more than Pat could bear.

"It isn't much," went on the doctor. "It doesn't seem to lead anywhere and I can't really make head or tail of it—but I'll tell you the facts as I know them." He leaned forward and spoke earnestly. "You remember how I went down to the garage and cleaned your car last week, as a surprise?" The girl nodded, speechless. "I thought at the same time I'd dust up John's car, too.—He was in town that day.—Well, I happened to have a small, flat silver pencil in the breast pocket of my shirt and, as I leaned over the rear seat, it fell out and slipped down behind the cushion. I'd had the pencil a long time and it was rather a nice one, so I didn't want to lose it. It had fallen so far down that I couldn't reach it with my fingers and I had to pull out the cushion."

"Yes, yes," cried Pat, eagerly.

"Under the cushion," said Doctor Stafford, slowly, "I found two license tags. I wouldn't have thought anything about it, perhaps, if I hadn't happened to notice that they were New York tags—and for this year—1919. That set me thinking. Why should he have two sets of tags for the same state

and year, I asked myself. I understood that he'd hired the car from somebody and since he's using it as a taxi, of course it has a commercial license, but it seemed very odd that he should still have the original set of tags, which of course must have belonged to the car before he hired it, you understand. It seemed a bit odd; and then it occurred to me that this might be the means of deciding, once and for all, whether Ned Driscoll was masquerading under the name of John Garrison."

"Yes," said Pat again, with even greater eagerness.

"Well, I made a note of the number and I wrote to the State Automobile License Bureau. Here is the reply," and the doctor produced a letter from his pocket. "Number Z4729—that's the number on the back of the car, the one he's using, you understand—that was taken out in the name of John Garrison. But the other, the one on the tags hidden under the seat—Number Z1356—was taken out by Mrs. Frances G. Sturdevant."

Patricia looked at him in blank astonishment.

"But—but why? What earthly reason——"

"I don't know," said the doctor, shaking his head. "I can't imagine. Mrs. Sturdevant—you must have read of her in the papers, Pat. She's a very wealthy woman—a widow, I think, and one of the richest women in New York. She's played a very fine part in the Red Cross work during the war. Gave herself and her millions with a free hand—went

over to the other side and worked in the hospitals. The best type of American woman. But how her car—for I can't think of any reason why it wouldn't be her car—comes to be reposing in your garage——"

"You don't suppose she sold it when she went abroad and that—John—rented it from——"

"It's a 1919 model," said the doctor, perplexedly, "and it's almost brand new. Been used pretty hard. The paint's badly scratched, but the cushions and carpets——"

Just then a boy on a bicycle rode up the aqueduct path and flung the morning paper through the open window. So intent were the doctor and Pat on the subject in hand that they were as startled as if it had been a missile. The paper opened as it fell. Mechanically, the doctor picked it up.

"Humph!" he exclaimed, as the staring headlines caught his eye. "Well, I can't say I'm awfully sorry for him."

"What is it, Doctor S. O. S.?" said Patricia, as the doctor resumed his seat.

"Nothing that need worry us, my dear. The Carstairs Trust Company closed its doors yesterday, as you see, and my pleasant friend, Baumgarten, has been arrested." He spoke absently, his mind still running on matters of more immediate interest. Tossing the paper aside, he went on: "Now about those license tags. If John had rented the car I don't see why he would have needed or wanted a new license number, since this county doesn't require a

special taxi license, as you know. There's only one good reason for the change of tags that I can think of, and that's absurd in the circumstances. Whatever else he may be, I'd stake my life that the boy isn't a thief."

Pat drew a long, horrified breath.

"No, no, Doctor S. O. S.," she cried. "Oh, he couldn't——"

"No, he couldn't, Pat. I'm as sure of that as you are." Doctor Stafford passed his hand through his thick gray hair, making it stand erect in a manner which would have been ludicrous if his face had not been so worried and anxious. "But I'm horribly puzzled. I wish—oh, I wish I could know—could help you, dear child. If only——"

"Doctor Stafford! Oh, Doctor Stafford!" A strong young voice hurled itself through the wind-swept sunlight and rushed in at the open window.

"It's he," groaned Patricia, clenching her hands and cowering back in the corner of the sofa. "Oh, I can't see him. Not now. Oh, Doctor S. O. S.——"

"Hello, Marco." The voice came again from just outside the house. "Where's the doctor? And Miss Carrington—have you seen her this morning?"

"Yes, sir, Mist' Garrison. I seen Missa Pat' go in when I firs' come, yes, sir. You finda dem bot' in house."

"Doctor S. O. S.!" A fist banged excitedly on the front door. "May I come in? I've got some good news."

Pat's face was white.

"Courage, comrade," whispered the doctor.

Crossing the room in haste, he opened the front door.

"What is it, John?" he questioned, eagerly.

"Ned Driscoll has cabled that he's coming home this week," the young man shouted. "Good old Ned! I'm so glad.—Why, what's the matter?"

The old physician's face had paled, perceptibly, and he leaned against the door jamb for support.

"Why, what in thunder's the matter, Doctor S. O. S.? You look——"

"Ned Driscoll coming home next week," the doctor repeated, dazedly.

"Why, yes. He was bound to come soon, now. He cabled Mr. Carrington and they telephoned the message out here."

The doctor stepped back into the hall and glanced quickly at Pat. She had risen to her feet and now stood rigid, staring, her clenched hands straining downward along her stiffened body.

"What does he mean?" she whispered.

Doctor Stafford could only shake his head.

"Come in and close the door, John," he called, over his shoulder. "Pat's here."

The young man's face was eager and animated as he entered the room, but at the sight of Patricia he stopped short.

"Why, what in Heaven's name is wrong?" he cried, looking from one to the other. "Is there any

reason why you aren't glad that Ned—your cousin Ned, Miss Patty—is coming home at last? I should have thought——"

Pat took two steps forward and fixed him with her eyes.

"Aren't *you* Ned Driscoll?" she panted.

His jaw dropped and his eyes opened wide in astonishment.

"Well, for the love of Mike!" he exclaimed. "Whatever made you think a thing like that?"

"Do you mean to tell me that this isn't a picture of you?" cried Pat, incredulously, jerking the snapshot from her pocket.

"Why, of course it is," he admitted, at once. "That was in the trenches near Verdun, I think. One that Tom Ambers took. He was always snapping everybody."

"Then you knew Tom Ambers."

"Why, certainly I did. He and Ned were great pals, and the three of us chummed together for a long time. Where did you get it?"

"Alicia Ambers sent it to me," said Patricia, gazing at him, fixedly.

"Tom's sister"—wonderingly. "How did she come to have a picture of me? If it had been Ned, now, I wouldn't so much have wondered——"

"John"—the doctor touched his arm—"John," he repeated, "Miss Ambers was under the impression, when she sent this to Pat, that it was a portrait of Ned Driscoll."

"Well, I'll be damned," said the young man, fervently.

"And you aren't Ned Driscoll?" The doctor and Pat spoke almost in the same breath. "You aren't my cousin Ned?"

"I am not. Not any. No!" He shook his head in violent denial. "How Alicia Ambers happened to imagine that this snapshot of me was Ned Driscoll, I can't think. Ned's been writing to her for a long time, I know, but he'd never have sent her a picture of me. Why should he? He's enough sight better looking than I am, and before I left he was as good as engaged. Great Scott! Oh, my Lord!"

Pat had dropped into a chair and buried her face in her hands. With one long stride John reached her and flung himself on his knees at her side.

"Pat! Oh, my dearest, dear little girl! Did Alicia Ambers write you that—oh, Pat, sweetheart, did you think——"

He took her hands in his and drew them gently away from her face. Their eyes met and held. . . . Neither of them heard the soft closing of the door.

"Pat, I love you," he whispered. "I've never loved any one but you. It's all a beastly mistake. You must believe me. I—oh, tell me that you do believe me, little girl! I can't bear——"

"I don't understand—I can't see—but—oh, I do

believe in you, John—John—— You are John, after all?"

"I am John, dear," he said, "and I love you, love you, love you. You are the only thing in life to me. If I'd lost you—through a misunderstanding—— Oh, I've been to blame! If I hadn't been a silly, romantic fool, I'd have—— Tell me, Pat"—he spoke swiftly, urgently—"tell me when you first suspected that I—that I was——"

"I thought on the very first day when you came out to see Uncle Morgan—I thought, then, that you might possibly be Ned and that you didn't say anything because of my driving the car as a taxi, you know. You understand?"

He nodded and Pat continued:

"When you came again, I thought you weren't very—well, frank, you know—about yourself and your people—I thought you seemed just a little embarrassed when Mother asked you about the Miss Garrison she used to know. . . . And then—there was the photograph I found in Uncle Morgan's table drawer."

"What photograph?" he asked, swiftly.

"The one of the Harvard crew of 19—, and you were among them."

Again he nodded slowly.

"Yes. I remember the group. Ned was in it, too. I can show you."

"And, John," she broke in, with a troubled, ear-

nest look at his face, "there were all the men's names written on the back—Driscoll—and—I don't remember any of the others, but, John—there wasn't any Garrison and I thought——"

The young man bowed his head.

"You thought I was masquerading," he said, in a stifled voice, "and so far, you were right, Pat. My name is John Garrison, but that isn't all of it. My last name is Vanderpool. Oh, Pat, dear, forgive me!" he cried, raising his pleading face to hers. "I'm so damned rich and I've had such a rotten time! All those beastly old hens of mothers clucking around after my filthy money, and those young girls in modern society with their horrid, greedy little eyes on the main chance. . . . A crowd of them came flocking around as soon as they knew I was home. I saw it was going to be just the same old rotten chase over again—and I'd just come back from France, where things were *real*. . . . And then I saw you. . . . And I thought—oh, forgive me, dear—I thought I'd just like to know a real girl, like you, sweetheart. To know her on the level, without my beastly money spoiling it all. . . . Can you understand? I'm saying it so badly, I know. . . . It didn't take me long to realize that the money wouldn't have made any difference to you, one way or the other. But I'd started in and, somehow, there hasn't seemed to be any good time to tell you until now. I was having such a wonderful time—and I was a coward—I didn't know how you'd take

it. Oh, Pat! It's the only way I have deceived you —on my honour. It's the only thing I've hidden. Say you forgive me, dear, dear little sweetheart."

He was still holding her hands clasped tightly in his. Now he drew them close and pressed them against his heart.

"Tell me," he whispered.

The girl breathed a long sigh and, closing her eyes, raised her face to his.

"I love you," she said—and all the world of sorrow and misunderstanding was blotted out as their lips met.

CHAPTER XXIV

IT WAS some little time later that Pat softly opened the kitchen door—and hesitated on the threshold when she became aware that Doctor Stafford was not alone.

The doctor gave one look at her face and turned hastily.

"It's all right, Marco," he said, addressing the smiling Italian who stood on the little back porch. "You can have the afternoon off if you need it. Be sure to be here to-morrow, though. I don't know how we'd manage without you."

"All righta, boss. Me on da job early to-morrow," and the grinning face disappeared.

The doctor turned back swiftly to Patricia.

"Well?" he said.

The girl did not speak but advanced toward him, her face suffused with a tremulous glory which made the old doctor blink.

"Is it all right, Pat?" he asked, huskily.

With a quick, fervent gesture, she threw both her arms around his neck and hugged him tight.

"Oh, it's so very all right, dear Doctor S. O. S.!" she cried, softly.

He caught her slender young arms in his hands

and held her for a moment, his tired, kind old face resting against her hair.

"God keep you, my little comrade," he murmured, with a catch in his throat.

"Oh, I'm so happy—so happy." She drew back a little way and looked into his eyes. "Do you think there's any girl in the world as happy as I am, dear Doctor S. O. S.?"

"I should doubt it very much, my dear," he answered, gravely, though his eyes twinkled.

"Come into the living room. We need you, John and I. We'll never be able to get along without you, you know, so you might as well make up your poor mind to that. We want to talk over things with you and to ask your advice about—oh, all sorts of things." She sighed happily. "There's so much to think of—so many plans to make. There are all your poor people. We can help you to help them, now. John says that the one time he drove you over to Harford gave him the willies—that's what he called it—and he wanted to tell you then about his having all that fearful lot of money and——"

"Hold on, Pat. You're making me dizzy. What do you mean by 'fearful lot of money?' I thought John was poor—that he—— Oh, take me to John. Maybe he can put me straight. My head's going round and round."

And John explained his innocent deception, apologetically and at length, much to the good old doctor's sympathetic amusement.

"It was a lark, I can see that, but it was rather dangerous business," said Doctor Stafford, shaking his head at John. "You might have made an awful mess of things, you know. And, even now, there are some things I don't understand. One of them is—how do you happen to be driving Mrs. Sturdevant's car as a taxi?"

John looked surprised.

"How did you know it was my aunt's car?" he asked.

"Oh! Mrs. Sturdevant is your aunt, is she? I didn't know."

"Yes. She's my mother's sister. Her name was Garrison, my mother's name. The Jane Garrison that your mother knew, Pat, is my aunt, too. I nearly had heart failure when she asked me about her. But I got by with it all right."

"Does Mrs. Sturdevant know that you are driving her perfectly good Peerless as a hack?" asked the doctor, grinning at the thought.

"She does by now, or will soon. She won't mind. She's a perfect brick. I wrote her about it the day I took it out of her garage. I had the key because I'm keeping my own car there, temporarily. I couldn't use it, it's a roadster and wouldn't have answered, but, oh, it's a bully little car—goes like a streak. You'll love it, Pat."

"And you took out a new license," said Doctor Stafford, thoughtfully, "so that if you got into any trouble with your taxi, Mrs. Sturdevant wouldn't be bothered about it. Was that it?"

"Why, yes, Doctor. Of course. But how did you know I got a new license?"

Then Stafford confessed his secret effort to decide the mooted question as to whether John was or was not Ned Driscoll, and they all had a good laugh at the fruitlessness of his quest. When the laughter had subsided, John leaned toward the doctor and said:

"Doctor Stafford, I can't tell you how—how bully I think it is of you to accept my word for—for everything, as if I'd never been such an idiot as to deceive you. And Pat, she hasn't asked for a bit of proof that what I've told her this morning is really so—and neither have you—but I feel that I owe it to myself to present my—credentials, would you call them?—to you, since Mr. Carrington isn't here. It wouldn't be necessary if he were, for I've met him several times."

"It isn't necessary to show them to me, John," said the doctor, quickly. "I flatter myself that I'm a good judge of men, and while you didn't tell us the whole truth, you did tell us, in the main, the truth and nothing but the truth, as far as it went, now, didn't you?"

"Yes," John laughed; and then, with a quiet dignity which became him well, he added: "But, just the same, I want to show you what papers I have with me. I have my discharge from the army and my commission and maybe, Pat, you'd like to see a couple of crosses they gave me over there."

"Oh, John, I'm just crazy to see them! And you'll tell us all about how you won them?"

"Oh, that was just a fluke—a piece of good luck. I didn't do anything," he said, as almost every American boy did say when he came back with honours bestowed by European and American governments alike. If one accepted those deeds of heroism in the great World War at the valuation of the principal actors in them, one would have been forced to the conclusion that most of the war decorations were most injudiciously awarded.

It was in vain that Pat and the doctor questioned and suggested. All they could get was a bare, rather apologetic statement—"I happened to see how we could clean out a machine-gun nest that was bothering us a lot, so we just went ahead and did it, that was all." And—"He was an awfully decent little chap. I couldn't let him lie out there, in that hell between the lines." What John had done was nothing, nothing at all. The other fellows all did as much and more. We have all heard the stories and have had to fill in the courage and heroism for ourselves.

They gave it up, after a time, and turned to more immediate considerations.

Pat had been looking, during the latter part of the conversation, at the picture of John which had been taken in the midst of the scenes he described so quietly. It brought her mind back to the little friend who had sent it to her.

"I don't know what I ought to write to Alicia Ambers," she said. "I wish you'd advise me, Doctor S. O. S. John can't think of any reason why Ned Driscoll should have sent this photograph to her instead of Ned's own, and yet, there must have been a reason, and John doesn't want——"

"I don't want to butt in, you see," said John. "Ned's crazy about Tom's sister, and since he's coming home so soon, I'd rather let him explain it in his own way. The situation is a little delicate, you see, and I can't understand——"

"Let me look at the picture again, Pat," said the doctor, taking it from her hand. "Hum! This is only part of a photograph," he mused. "You see the white edge of the print runs around three sides only."

John leaned forward.

"I hadn't noticed that in the excitement," he said. "Yes, I remember now. That was a snapshot Tom took of Ned and me together. It's been cut in two—and—— By George! I wonder . . . Mike Finnegan! If he'd had the chance . . . " He slapped his open hand down on the table. "If Mike Finnegan had the chance, it's the very thing he would have done—put in the wrong half of the picture, I mean. And he might have. He was detailed to collect the mail—about that time it was, I'm pretty sure. . . . Now, just imagine"—he hitched his chair forward—"supposing, Pat, that Ned, just before he sealed his letter, had cut the

photograph in two and thrown this one of me away, and supposing that Mike came along just then and told Ned to hurry with his mail and that Ned gave him the letter to Alicia Ambers before the gum on the envelope was dry. We were all joshing Ned about writing so often to a girl he'd never seen, and Mike was pretty sure to have known about it. He's just the sort to have thought it great sport to put one over on Ned. As soon as Ned was out of sight, he'd have opened the letter, slipped out Ned's picture, and put mine in place of it. Look here," he exclaimed, excitedly, "see this smear of dried mud on the corner. I'll bet anything you like that Ned threw this away, just as I said, and that Mike Finnegan was the one who sent it to Alicia Ambers."

And this, as they found out later, was almost exactly what had happened. The silly practical joke had come near wrecking several lives, though Alicia Ambers never would admit that she didn't greatly prefer the real Ned to the portrait which she had supposed to be his. It caused Pat to feel, though she did not mention it, that, in this instance, her little friend displayed a surprising lack of judgment and taste.

CHAPTER XXV

OH, BUT this was a day of days for Mrs. Carrington! Her "tender mother heart," to quote her own words, thrilled over her daughter's happiness. The fact that John Garrison had turned out to be one of the Vanderpools—"*the* Vanderpools of New York," she could hear herself saying to her intimate friends in Speedwell—was received by her with almost religious ecstasy. It seemed quite natural and proper that an all-wise and beneficent Providence should take great pleasure in watching over the destinies of an aristocratic family like the Desmonds of North Carolina. It seemed as if there were nothing left for her to desire. John, with wonderful consideration and generosity, had insisted at once that he should buy back, for her own use, the old Southern home at Speedwell. She could see herself queening it there, the house restored to its original splendour and all the North Carolina county families for miles about enjoying its old-time hospitality.

It did not matter in the least that John and Patricia would be living in the old Vanderpool mansion in New York. She would "sacrifice anything to her darling child," and she would not be lonely. There were plenty of distant connections of her own family who would be only too glad to

come for long visits in "the dear old Southern fashion," and they would be much easier to manage (though this she did not think necessary to mention) than Patricia, of whom she had always stood a little in awe. It was even better than it would have been if her unacknowledged dream of making a happier life for Morgan had materialized.

And there would be money, quantities of money to be had, even without the asking. She could see that. She was so glad that she had always lived a pure, unselfish life and could feel that all these and other bounties were so richly deserved.

Now Morgan Carrington's long unexplained absence troubled her not at all. She was not one, she thanked Heaven with upturned eyes, to dwell upon past sorrows, and she threw herself, heart and soul, into the happiness of her darling child.

Pat could not so lightly forget her dear father's brother who had been to her so kind and sympathetic, and her joy was tempered by the grief that he was not there to share it with her. In spite of this undercurrent of sorrow John's enthusiasm could not fail to sweep Pat along with it as he planned their happy future.

"I'm crazy to have you meet my people, Pat," John said. "You're going to like my two aunts, I know. Frances—Mrs. Sturdevant, you know, the one whose car I stole—she's so little older than I that I've always called her Frances—she's a winner, and I can hardly wait for her to get back from the

other side. She'll love you, dear, and I know you'll love her. . . . And there are the houses that were wished on me by the family. Some of them are rented now, but you can look them over and see which ones you'd like to have. The old family morgue on Fifth Avenue is pretty good—at least, I think it would be when you took hold of it. I've kept it sort of half open, and it's rather a jolly old shack, or it was when Father and Mother were alive. . . . Then we have another place just across the river, above here, that really is a little bit of all right. Frances has been living there, off and on, for a few weeks in the spring and fall, to keep it in order for me. . . . How'd you like—oh, Pat, wouldn't it be fun to go over this afternoon and see it? There's a bully little Italian garden just at the foot of the Palisades. I can't wait to see you in it. It would be the perfect setting for you. . . . There'll be no more taxicab business for us, little girl," John laughed, with boyish enthusiasm, "but it was larks while it lasted, wasn't it?"

"Yes, John," Pat smiled up at him. "It was jolly—most of it. But I had a rather bad half hour just at the last, and I'm glad it's over."

John shut his teeth together.

"So am I," he said. "That infernal cur!—Oh, well, let's not think about him. . . . How about going across the river this afternoon? I can 'phone and have them give us a sort of picnic supper. There's a caretaker there, and his wife's a bully

cook. They have a garden and chickens. Oh, they can fix us up all right." He leaned over and whispered, "Your mother wouldn't think we needed a chaperon, would she? We'll be back early in the evening."

"I don't think she'll mind anything you propose, John, and I think it would be too lovely! I've looked over at that side of the river with longing eyes ever since we've been here. It looks so remote and wonderful, but I didn't know there was any way of getting over from this side."

"Oh, yes. There's a small power boat that comes across to a pier at Dorrs Ferry, if you run up a signal, and it's like getting right out of the world. Once you're over there, you'd think you were a thousand miles from New York. Come on, let's ask your mother."

Thus it was that, soon after lunch, the two young people, with all the world before them, started to view a portion of that part of it which, in a special sense, already belonged to John Garrison Vanderpool.

They walked along the aqueduct to Dorrs Ferry, descended through the quiet village to the small pier below the railroad station, and John proceeded to raise, by means of a rope, a large white board which ran up between two long posts and formed a somewhat primitive but effective signal to the ferry man upon the other side of the river.

The time did not seem long to them as they

waited, sitting on the string-piece of the dock, dangling their feet over the edge and talking happily of all things under the sun. They had so much to say to each other that it seemed as if only a few minutes had passed before they descried a small open power boat advancing leisurely across the silky-smooth, blue water. As soon as it was within hailing distance, John called out:

"Hello, Captain Brown!"

The man in the stern shaded his eyes with a wrinkled, tanned hand.

"Well, if it isn't Mr. John!" he exclaimed. "It's glad I am to see you home, sir, safe and sound. We've been expectin' of you for a long time. Why didn't Martin let me know you was comin' across this afternoon? I'd 'a' been here waitin' fer you," and he grinned up at them as the boat bumped along the float.

"I wasn't sure, when I 'phoned Martin this morning, just what time we'd be coming over, and we weren't in any hurry," said John, helping Pat into the boat while Captain Brown held it steady with a rope thrown around a bulkhead. He shook the old man's free hand with engaging cordiality and turned to Pat. "Captain Brown and I are old, old friends, Pat," he said. "We netted shad together when I was so little that he had to sit on me part of the time to keep me in the boat. Are the shad running now, Captain Brown, or is it too late?"

"It's too late, and they ain't what they used to be,

anyway, now," returned the captain. He was looking at Patricia with the frank curiosity of the man whose life is spent in the quiet places of the earth.

"This is my fiancée, Miss Carrington, Captain Brown," said John, with pride. It was the first time he had introduced her to any one, and he was pleased by the look of admiration and respect which he saw in the old man's eyes, for he knew that all the servants and retainers, especially in the old home where they lived and died in the service of the Vanderpools, were jealous of everyone who came into the family.

"You'll be making the old place look like itself again, miss," said the captain, with a smile, touching his cap. "It's been a long time since there was any young people about, and we'll all be glad if the old house's to be occupied fer more'n a few weeks, spring and fall. I wish ye both joy, Mr. John. I can't say no fairer nor that." And, slightly embarrassed by his boldness, the old man cast off and started his engine.

Pat felt that never in her life had she seen anything so adorably beautiful as the great river looked on that clean summer day. The wind blew softly from the northwest and the air was clear, with a vital thrill which set her pulses racing. She and John sat close together in the stern, their clasped hands hidden by a fold of Pat's skirt. The captain, with his back discreetly turned, divided his attention between the tiny engine and the wheel.

The slender boat cut its way through the blue and green undulations of the water and, as they moved slowly westward, the Palisades, which from the other side appeared an irregular, flat wall, developed great battlemented buttresses crowned with living green; stupendous, lonely, and inaccessible save for the cascade of tender green fields and woods which flowed down through a broad valley to the shore, toward which the boat was headed.

Patricia's eyes were shining with the joy of life when they landed, and all that afternoon seemed to her like an exquisite dream. The old stone, Dutch farmhouse, which Peter Vanderpool had built away back in the time when Dorrs Ferry was really a ferry town and New York yet in its robust infancy, had remained practically unaltered. The place was so remote and inaccessible that almost no one used the rough, winding road which was its only link to the back country and, as the Vanderpools had owned the ferry and several miles of the river front for more than a century, they had been able to preserve the beautiful solitude of the place.

The sunny peace of the lawns and meadows, the gracious stillness of the great trees which shaded the path along the river, made a perfect setting for an idyll of young love and joy and hope.

After they had stopped at the house and received a cordial welcome from Martin, the caretaker, and his wife, John and Patricia, in the understanding silence of utter happiness, made their way along the rocky

path, hand linked in hand, like two children. As they descended toward the shore, Pat became aware of the sound of trickling water, and suddenly, at a turn of the path, looking out from the shadow of the trees, she saw the delicate tracery of broken, leaping drops falling athwart the sunlight from a great height of rock and moss and ferns. She caught her breath.

"Oh!" she cried—and again, "Oh!"

She could not say anything more, but the look on her face was enough for John.

The water fell into a deep, broad pool of warm-coloured stone. Thence it ran under the path into a mossy, marble basin above which an old Buddha sat in infinite contemplation. Stretching in front of him was an avenue of towering cedars, between which were set great green casks from which grew tall trees of pink and white oleander. At the end of this, against the blue waters of the river, crowned with a trellis and covered with golden-green masses of vines and swelling grapes, were thick white columns, so perfect in shape and contour and in that setting that they seemed, like the trees, to be a generous product of the soil. They were set in two rows along the river, upon a broad lichen-painted base, which curved outward in the centre on the shoreward side, leaving space for a round, shallow pool on which water lilies floated.

"If you look in there," John whispered, for the silence was too perfect to be broken by more than a breath, "you'll see Undine. She comes up from the

river every day, looking for her soul. She'll find it to-day. Look in, dear heart. You'll see it in her eyes." And as they bent together above the clear pool—"Her soul in her dear eyes," he repeated.

The reflection of the two young faces broke as a tanager, like a scarlet flame, darted by and touched the surface with his wings. When the pool was still again, upon its mirror lay the shadow of two slender figures, clasped in each other's arms.

"My girl," John whispered, "my little sweetheart. My dear, my dear." . . .

CHAPTER XXVI

THE golden day wore on. When the shadows began to steal out across the sunny river, Martin, heralded by the faint rattle of a light hand cart, appeared. At the end of the path he took a wicker hamper from the cart and carried it down to the old stone table at one end of the pergola. His wrinkled face shone as he took from its depths an old covered silver dish filled with fried chicken, delicately brown, a crisp salad, little hot rolls folded together so that they looked as if they were laughing, Pat said; and, to crown the feast, an antique blue Chinese bowl of fragrant red raspberries and a pitcher of thick cream.

"Next to all the rest of this wonderful world, I think this is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen," said Pat. "I'm hungry, John, oh, so hungry, though I didn't know it till Martin came, like a genie in the Arabian Nights."

Martin, thus referred to, grinned appreciatively and looked to his young master for orders.

"Tell Susan for me, Martin, that I think she's sent us everything that heart could desire," said John, "and you needn't wait. You can come back for

the things in a couple of hours. There's no hurry."

Martin chuckled as he went back along the path.

"No hurry, Mister John, no hurry," he said to himself. "Sure there's no hurry for the likes of me, when the young master brings his sweetheart home. It's a good job for all of us, I should say, be the look of her sweet face. Well, he deserves her, God bless him. I'll not hurry, Mister John," shaking his gray head, "you may be sure o' that. I was young once meself."

Slowly the shadows of the great cliffs stretched themselves upon the waters. Clear and blue, the great arch of the sky towered above them. Tall clouds strolled across the azure fields, like leisurely gods and goddesses, in no haste to make their way back to Olympus.

When the last warm tints of the afterglow had faded, John rose and stretched out his hands to Patricia. She took them with a little sigh of utter contentment.

"I suppose this means that our wonderful day is over, John," she said, smiling happily up at him.

"Over for to-day, sweetheart," he answered, putting his arm about her as they strolled along the path. "But it's home, home, home for you and me, for ever and ever. There'll be other days and brighter days even than this, for both of us. . . . My great-great-great-grandfather built this place, and his children grew up around him under these same old trees." . . .

She drew closer to him and the clasp of their hands tightened. The shadows of night softly descended and closed in around them.

They did not return to the old house, but kept on through the woods to the road which tumbled down to the river. Their minds were full of themselves and of the future. So shut away they seemed from all the ordinary things of life that when they neared the edge of the wood, they were startled by the sound of voices just ahead.

"Only a farmer or someone from the back country going down to the ferry," John explained, in a low tone. "We'll let them pass."

But though they waited in silence for a moment, the voices did not diminish. They were low and guarded, but one of them struck John as familiar. He and Pat were both wearing tennis shoes, so that their feet had made little or no noise, and the two men, earnestly conversing, were quite unaware of their presence. John leaned down and whispered in Pat's ear.

"Doesn't that sound like our friend Marco?" he asked.

He heard her gasp a little. She clutched his arm and with her other hand drew his head down to the level of her lips.

"The other voice," she panted. "Did you ever hear it before? It sounds—— Oh, John!"

Tensely still, they both listened.

A man coughed slightly and Pat's fingers bit into

John's arm. The voice came clearly now in the dead silence, quick and decisive.

"Well, it's about time, anyway, only——"

"Uncle Morgan!" cried Pat. "Oh, Uncle Morgan!" and leaped forward.

"What! Why, good Lord, it isn't—— Why——"

Two men stepped out from the shadows and stood faintly silhouetted against the lighter darkness of the open road. Pat sprang toward the less bulky shape.

"Uncle Morgan!" she cried again. "Are you real? Is it really you, at last! Oh!" and she threw herself into his arms.

"Why, Patty—why, Patty, my child! Do you really care? Do you care so much? Why, I didn't think—I couldn't have believed—— There, there, my dear. It's all right. I was coming home pretty soon, anyway. . . . Oh, don't cry, little girl! Damn it, I'm not worth it. Marco, you infernal fool, why didn't you tell me?—Oh, there, there, Patty. God bless you, my dear. I had no idea——"

He clasped her closely in his arms and kissed her with a quick, abrupt gesture in which there was no lack of feeling.

"Marco," he said, still holding her in his arms and addressing the shadow at his side, irascibly, "you didn't tell me about this, damn it. You said Miss Patty was all right, happy as a bird most of the time and all that sort of thing. I might have known she'd put up a good front and you'd never see anything. Oh, confound it all! Patty, my dear, listen. I did

it for you, you see. Mostly for you, at least. Mostly for you. Can you understand? I guess I was an old fool, but it seemed a good idea. I couldn't think of any way of winning that—I mean your mother—over, and I wanted you to have a chance to do something—something interesting and worth while. I thought——" He broke off suddenly. "But what are you doing on this side of the river at night and alone, my child? It——"

Just then John stepped forward.

"She isn't alone, Mr. Carrington," he said. "I brought her over to see——"

"Oh, you're the young man Marco told me about," interrupted Morgan Carrington, peering at him in the dim light. "Garrison—was it?"

"Yes—and no, Mr. Carrington," said John, coming closer and holding out his hand. "It's John Vanderpool, Ned's friend, you know. I met you several times at the Ascot, do you remember?"

Carrington looked at him closely.

"Why, yes," he said, slowly. "Yes, I think I would have recognized you if the light had been better. But I thought—Marco said that the young man who was staying in my house was named Garrison."

"So I am," said John, somewhat embarrassed, "John Garrison Vanderpool."

"Hum-m-m," grunted Carrington. "I see. But what the devil do you mean——"

John explained, at length, what the devil he meant, and Carrington listened in silence.

At the end, he turned his face toward Pat, who still stood in the protecting circle of his arm. He put his hand under her chin and lifted her face to his.

"What do you say, Patty?" he asked. "Have you forgiven this young masquerader for fooling us all? Well, then, I suppose I must, too," and he held out his hand. "I'm not exactly in a position to find fault with youthful pranks when, at my age—— Oh, well, come on—let's all go home. What do you say? We can talk it all out comfortably there. And good old S. O. S. will want to hear all the 'horrible details.' How is the old boy? Marco says—what were you saying about Doctor Stafford just now, Marco?"

"I say Doct' Staff' gooda man, me, yes," said Marco, speaking for the first time, though he had been listening with eager interest and curiosity. "I say he de bes' gooda man I know 'cep' de boss, yes."

"Oh, he's a damsight better than I am, Marco. The less said about me, the better," said Carrington, ruefully. "A fool and a coward to boot, I am," he added, under his breath. Then in a louder tone, Come on. It's nearly nine o'clock. Brown said he was crossing back at nine, didn't he, Marco?"

"Yes, boss."

"Well, he can take us all back together. You tell your brother for me, Marco, that he can have the things I left at his house. He's welcome to 'em, especially the shaving kit. Thank God, I won't have to shave again as long as I live."

"I was going to ask you about that, Uncle Mor-

gan," said Pat, as they made their way down the steep road, John on one side of her, Carrington on the other, and Marco bringing up the rear. "You look so strange without your beard, even in this light, that I wouldn't have known you except for your voice and that little cough of yours—I'd recognize that anywhere."

"Hum, yes. I suppose you would. . . . Shaving my beard was another of my bright ideas. I'll tell you all about it when we get home. Don't care to go over it more than once. Rather hear about you—and John Vanderpool—and all that you've been up to since I went away. Marco's kept me pretty well posted about outside facts, but he couldn't be on deck all the time, and his opportunities were somewhat limited, though, of course, he did his best."

Marco grinned in the darkness. It was a great deal for the boss to say, and he knew it.

All the way across the river and up to the house Morgan Carrington kept the young people talking about themselves and refused, with his customary peremptoriness, to answer any further questions.

When they neared Doctor Stafford's door he paused.

"Let's all go in and spring ourselves on Stuart," he said, chuckling. "I think, if it pleases the heavenly powers, I can put off explaining to your mother, Patty, till the morning."

John laughed inwardly. He could readily appreciate Mr. Carrington's wish to put off an evil day.

Even Pat could understand and sympathize with her uncle's feelings. It wasn't really necessary to bother her mother to-night, and Doctor S. O. S. would be so rejoiced. . . .

The doctor's living room was lighted and they could see, through the open window, the old man seated beside the table, reading.

Carrington motioned them to be silent and wait, and alone he advanced to the door.

"Did you get your watch from Tiffany's all right, Stuart?" he said, quietly.

The doctor started, rose to his feet, and stood facing his old friend. After a moment he said, perfectly calmly:

"Yes, Morgan, I got it without any trouble. Where the devil have you been? And what have you done to your face?"

"Never mind my face, S. O. S.," said Carrington, somewhat nettled. "Aren't you surprised to see me?"

Stafford grinned.

"Yes. Of course I am, in a way, Morgan," he said. "But I'm not going to pamper you by letting you see it."

He put his hand on his friend's shoulder and gripped it hard. For a moment the two men looked into each other's eyes. Then their hands met in a strong clasp.

"Hum, hum," said Carrington, clearing his throat. "Come in, Patty, and you, too, John Vanderpool.

Old S. O. S. has taken the blow of the prodigal's return standing, as usual. Hum, yes. You come in, too, Marco. They may want your testimony."

The grinning Italian followed John and Pat into the room. The doctor expressed, verbally, no surprise at seeing Marco in such company, but his eyebrows were raised to an interrogation point as he watched his faithful gardener seat himself, gingerly, on a chair near the door.

"Now, tell us all about what you've been and gone and done, Morgan," said Stafford, eagerly, when they were all seated. "Begin at the beginning and let's have it straight through. Why, in Heaven's name, did you cut away, and where did you go—and all about it."

"I went away on Patty's account, in the first place. At least, that was my principal object," said Carrington, stroking the ghost of his vanished beard. "I'd got it into my head that there was only one way for her to have any sort of decent life and that was to give her some kind of a profession. You know, Stuart, that it's always been a hobby of mine. I worried myself nearly sick about it for months, but I couldn't make any impression on her mother—at least, I—oh, well—I mean not the kind of impression—— You know what I mean—she wouldn't give her consent."

Stafford smiled covertly, realizing that Morgan's tongue had almost slipped into betraying another possible reason for his wishing to disappear—a reason

which the doctor more than half suspected, since he had been an amused witness to Louise Carrington's discreet pursuit of her wealthy brother-in-law previous to his disappearance.

"Well," Carrington continued, "I studied the thing over and it seemed to me that if I were to vanish and Patty were left entirely without funds, she'd be absolutely on her own, as they say, and that she'd get what was best for her. The thing appealed to me in a lot of ways and I knew just how it could be done. I had it all planned out, but I hadn't quite made up my mind to do it when you, Stuart and Patty, found that 'Black Hand' thing on the door. I saw at once that it would give quite a lurid colour to my disappearance—make it seem natural and convincing. It was such a good chance that I couldn't bear not to take advantage of it; and on the spur of the moment—I just left. I didn't think you'd mind much, Patty, my dear. I really didn't." He turned to her with an almost pleading note in his voice. "You were so young and I—I didn't know you really cared about your cross old uncle. Why should you?"

"Oh, but I do, Uncle Morgan!"

"Yes, yes. I see that now, my dear. But I didn't know—I just thought it would be a way of getting for you what you wanted most. But I was a fool—as usual. You needn't say it, S. O. S. I can see it for myself. However, it's over now. No use going back, is there, Patty?"

"No, Uncle Morgan. Don't mind about it. I know you meant to do the very best thing for me, and I'm so glad you're back I can't think of anything else," and Pat gave her uncle's hand a quick, affectionate squeeze.

"You see, my dear," said Carrington, retaining her hand in his, "I had Marco watching all of you from the very start, and if you'd gotten into any serious difficulties he could have reached me by telephone and I could have resurrected myself in an hour or so at the most. I was at his brother's fruit farm, just across the river. I could see the house here clearly on a fair day. I was so near at hand that I couldn't realize, my dear, that—that you'd suffer—through thinking that something terrible had happened to your worthless old Uncle Morgan. And Marco gave such glowing accounts of you all: how you were all busy as bees and all helping each other."

"Oh, we were, Uncle Morgan," cried Pat, enthusiastically. "If it hadn't been for worrying about you it would have been nothing but larks."

"You see, S. O. S.," said Carrington, grinning triumphantly at his old friend, "it's all right, and I accomplished my hellish purp, as we used to say, for Patty's been doing a good business with the car and I'll wager she had a damn good time, didn't you, Patty?"

The girl nodded, smiling. Every faint cloud had vanished from her horizon.

"But go on with the story, Morgan," said Doctor

Stafford. "You've only just begun. We'll concede your reason—or reasons," with a whimsical grin, "for going. Now tell us the rest."

"Oh, there isn't much to tell," returned Carrington, "I 'phoned Marco as soon as I got into town the day I left. He'd been doing a lot of odd jobs for me ever since I retired from business, and I've kept him on the payroll."

"De boss, he give Marco big lot money all time since long, long while," broke in the smiling Italian. "Use work foreman for Missa Carrin'ton, way back w'en we bot' was young man, yes. We help each odder lot time, yes. He stood up for Marco w'en one big Mick wan' kill me one time. De boss rush in, he did, an' *thck!*—like dat he have big Mick roll on de groun'. Marco not t'ink he can do—he such li'l' man, de boss"—he wagged his head in enjoyment of the remembrance—"but he gotta what you calla grit, de boss has, an'——"

"Shut up, Marco," said Carrington, abruptly, though his voice was less gruff than usual. "They don't want to hear about that. You've paid that score off too many times to talk about it any more."

He turned back to the others.

"Marco wasn't exactly delighted with my plan, but he didn't know how to keep from helping me. We talked it over all the way up to the Carstairs Trust Company—by the way," he broke off, "I saw by the paper Marco brought over to-day that they've 'busted' just as I expected."

Stafford leaned forward suddenly.

"Then you knew?"

"Yes. I knew that unprincipled villain, Baumgarten, was running the concern on the rocks. It was solid enough before he made the combination which squeezed Lindsay Forsythe out of it. I had to to go up to the bank before I left and draw out the rest of my money and Ned Driscoll's. I didn't dare to take a chance on its failing while I was gone. I'd been taking it out gradually for more than a month previous, so as not to make more trouble than was necessary."

"So that was the reason you took all that money away with you, was it?" said Stafford, in a relieved tone.

"Of course. But what did you know about that, Stuart?"

And the doctor explained.

"Whew! That must have given you a bad quarter of an hour," exclaimed Carrington. "Must have looked as if I'd absconded with Ned's money. Oh, Lord! I never thought you'd have that to add to your troubles."

"Did you take all that money away with you, wherever you went?" asked the doctor.

"Lord, no. I just drove around the corner and deposited it in the Forrester's National, with Marco for bodyguard, as I did when I drew out the rest. Didn't like to carry any large sums of cash alone while all these daylight robberies were going on."

"So Marco was the strange man we've been looking for," cried Stafford, and laughed unrestrainedly.

"Yes, Marco's been the god in the machine all through," said Carrington. "As I said before, he got his brother, over back of Wilbours Landing, where we were this evening, to take me in, and no questions asked. Though so easily accessible from here, it was such an out-of-the-way place that no one who knew me was likely to see me, and, anyway, they would hardly have recognized me in this tasteful apparel Marco selected for me at Macy's"—he looked down at the rough workman's suit he was wearing. "I shaved my beard off, as that seems to be the disguise affected by most fugitives. Then Marco kept watch here, day and night, as well as he could, and reported to me. He spotted the coloured woman who was bothering Sam and Lily pretty early in the game, and I made a guess that she had decorated the back door thinking it was the kitchen entrance. Marco couldn't interfere without giving himself away, and he was sure you all didn't know anything about it further than the first warning. I knew, of course, that it couldn't have been intended for me or for any of us, but I was glad when I found out the whole status of the case."

"But, Morgan, somebody broke into the house while you were gone. Did Marco tell you and have you any idea who it might have been?"

Carrington grinned a trifle sheepishly.

"That was one place where I really did bungle in a

way that I'm ashamed of," he said. "Marco didn't want me to try it on, but I just had to have my old pipe." He took it from his pocket and regarded it affectionately.

"Morgan!" ejaculated the doctor. "Do you mean to say that you broke into your own house in the dead of night for the sake of a pipe?"

"Oh, it wasn't so very late and I didn't break in, for I had the front-door key. I'd been without that pipe for nearly two weeks, and I couldn't stand it any longer. I thought I could put my hand right on it, and I was so damn mad when I found that it had been moved, that I wouldn't have gone away without it if I'd had to give the whole show away. I would have stopped to put things back the way I found them and no one would have been the wiser if Lily hadn't set up that infernal racket. What was the matter with her, anyway?"

"Just a black cat which she thought was a 'hant,'" laughed Pat. It all seemed funny and jolly to her now that it was over, and she could see that John and the doctor were equally amused.

"One more question, Morgan," said Stafford, "I think I understand almost everything in this absurd situation now, only I don't quite see why you took the trouble to go to Franklin Thornton and make an addition to your will."

"Well, Stuart, you certainly have been busy, haven't you?" laughed Carrington, slapping his friend's knee. "Who'd have thought that you'd

ferret out all these side lines? I'm beginning to have almost a feeling of respect for you, old man, and if ever I commit a serious crime, I'll be sure you aren't around. How'd you come to get into touch with Thornton?"

"Had to have some advice. Didn't know what you were up to," smiled the doctor, "and wasn't taking chances on queering your game. So I went to Thornton and, after deliberating and hemming and hawing till I thought I'd go mad, he told me of that last provision in your will and I fail to see——"

"Why," said Carrington, a little defensively, "I am thorough, you see. Always was. And when I set out to do a thing I sort of want to put it through. Accidents happen every day, and I didn't want anything to interfere with Patty's having a chance to try her wings. Life, at my age, especially, is pretty uncertain, and if, by any chance, I'd gone out, you know, before she'd sorted things out for herself, I wanted to fix it so that there wouldn't be funds readily available. It was a remote contingency, of course, and I never thought the provision in the will would come to light unless something serious happened to me."

The doctor looked at him with admiration.

"Morgan," he said, "for a crazy man, you certainly have a practical and farseeing mind"—and they all laughed.

They went on talking for a long time after that. Carrington kept his attention pretty equally divided

between John and Patty, and the longer he observed them, the more reconciled he became to the frustration of his plan for making a match between his niece and Ned Driscoll. It had seemed to him a good idea, but a man was a fool who thought he could interfere, seriously, with the romance of young hearts, and, quixotic as Morgan Carrington was, he was far from being a fool.

Marco had departed some time before, and at last, the hour being late, Carrington suggested that they should leave the doctor to a well-earned repose. There was a light in his eyes as he watched the two young people saying their "Good-nights" to Stuart Stafford. The evidence of the happiness and cordiality of their relationship pleased him more than he would have cared to show. Those two had made good, it was perfectly obvious, with old S. O. S., and that fact, to Morgan Carrington, was the highest evidence of their worth and character. There was no one in the world whom he so greatly admired and loved and trusted as he did this old friend of his, though few would have guessed it from his normal brusque attitude.

"Patty," he said, "you and John Vanderpool go ahead and see if the coast is clear. I've talked so much to-night that my throat's sore and I don't want to tell it all over again to your mother, my dear. If she's still up, hang out a red light and I'll wait."

Pat laughed her old, rippling, carefree laugh.

"Good-night, dear Doctor S. O. S.," she said, still

clinging to his hand. "You've been everything to John and me and you needn't think, just because Uncle Morgan has come home, that I'm going to let you off. I'm going to bring all my special perplexities to you whenever they come up, and you're going to help me all through my life, just as you have been doing. So you might just as well make up your mind to that, you poor dear."

"I subscribe to all Pat says," said John, wringing the doctor's hand, and they slipped off together into the darkness. At the farthest edge of the light shining from the open door, the old men saw John put his arm about the slender white figure, saw the girl lean a little toward him, raising her face to his.

"Two fine children, Morgan," said Stafford, softly, as they turned away. "Two fine, happy young things, with all the world before them and everything in it to insure a beautiful future—health and love and wealth."

Carrington looked at him quizzically.

"I've made an awful ass of myself, Stuart, haven't I?" he said, ruefully. "She's not going to need any profession, even if she had been able to jump into a really suitable one, with all the Vanderpool millions at her disposal. I haven't accomplished a damn thing by my idiotic exploit, except that I've had more than a month of roughing it, working on Pietro's fruit farm all day and sleeping at night like the dead, and I feel ten years younger."

"Well, you have accomplished one thing," said

Stafford, with a whimsical side glance, "or rather it's accomplished itself without much help from you, so don't value yourself too highly on it."

"You mean?"

"Oh, I don't mean anything special," Stafford laughed, "if you don't want me to. I'm just mentioning, casually, that our young friend John has made all the arrangements already to give his prospective mother-in-law a happy, comfortable life—in North Carolina."

"And she's agreed?" questioned Carrington, eagerly.

"She has, my boy. So don't flatter yourself that——"

"Thank God!" ejaculated Carrington, fervently. "S. O. S., you know I was almost in a panic before I went away. I really was. I can't describe it to you. That woman!—I felt so helpless—you wouldn't believe. . . . When it comes to a stand-up fight I'm not afraid of anybody alive, but that deadly, quiet, sweet, soft persistence. Oh, Lord! . . . I didn't know where she was going to have me next. And I couldn't say much, on Patty's account, you know, or do much, either. It was like a wild grapevine you see in the woods—pretty and soft and gentle—and twisting itself, twisting itself, around and around. . . . I wanted Patty to have a chance, Stuart, that's honest. But the real God's truth of the matter is that when I

saw what a good chance I had, I just ran away! You needn't laugh like a handsome old hyena, you old heathen. How would you have liked it yourself?"

"I would have been scared worse than you were, Morgan," chuckled the doctor. "Thank God, I haven't any money."

"That was it, of course," said Carrington, "and now that Patty's by way of making such a match, you're sure, you're quite sure, S. O. S., that there isn't any further danger?"

"No, Morgan," grinned Stafford. "I'm certain there's not a bit. You should hear what she's planned already. The old home at Speedwell to be refitted, and all the rest. No, old man, you're as safe in your selfish old life as I am, and that's as safe as it's humanly possible to be."

Carrington grasped his hand.

"Thank you, S. O. S., thank you for those kind words. And for all the rest," he added, in a lower tone and with an unusual show of feeling. "If I hadn't been sure that Patty was in such good hands, I never would have—— You're a brick, old man. You always have been. I must say it, once in my life. Always steady at the wheel and always there when any one wants help on any occasion, big or little, and I—— Oh, well—good-night, S. O. S." And with another strong grip of the doctor's fingers, he vanished into the night.

Stafford listened to his departing footsteps and then turned back into the house and closed the door. There was a smile on his kind old face.

"Have I really been of use to them?" he wondered, as he slowly undressed. "But it's absurd. I didn't do anything. I was just here. That was all. I wish I could think that——

"Those two dear children—God bless 'em! They'll be happy—and useful. . . . Sure to be. . . . What opportunities for them, with all their wealth. And they both see it that way—to be of service in the world . . . a trust . . ."

He stood for a moment at the open window, looking out into the quiet night. His heart was full of happiness, the unselfish happiness of those who, some on wild seas, some on red battlefields, some in the little quiet corners of the earth, hold themselves, ever and always, in readiness to answer to the call of "S O S."

As he turned his old, white face up to the calm and shining stars, he looked like the priest of an old and noble religion, of the divine religion of love and service.

"Happy hearts—youth and love," he murmured, softly. "Like ours, Miss Mary," and added, as he had every night since she left him, looking up through wind and storm, through snow and sleet and, as now, through the calm, blue space of the sky, "Good-night, Miss Mary."

He crept into bed and, as he fell asleep, he was thinking:

"The tomatoes and peppers are doing well. We'll have a fine crop. . . . Pat liked the delectable pickle I made from old Mrs. Pomeroy's receipt. I must have some ready when they come back in the winter. . . . Let me see—an ounce of mace, a quart of vinegar, a half pound of sugar . . ."

THE END